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ABSTRACT

A collection of working papers on English as a second language (ESL) instruction includes: "A Structured Approach to Teaching Composition" (Margery Tegey); "Teaching Writing' to ESL Students: A Process-Based Approach" (Marie Nelson); "When Theory and Intuition Meet: An Approach to Composition Instruction" (Ali A. Aghbar, Kathy Trump); "Shakespeare Made Simple" (Susan English); "The Mainstream English Language Training Project" (Tim Riney); "Play On Words: Teaching Sentence Expansion and Modification by Computer" (Roberta Boss); "Job Satisfaction Among ESL Teachers in Higher Education: A Preliminary Study" (Lois Lanier); and "The Problem with Formal Research Papers" (Dona De Sanctis). (MSE)

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MARGERY TEGEY AND MARY NIEBUHR

A STRUCTURED APPROACH TO TEACHING COMPOSITION

Margery Tegey

Georgetown University

Many of the methods commonly used to teach composition to advanced ESL students fail to give adequate recognition to the complexity, creativity, and nonlinearity of the composing process, particularly to the ways idea generation occurs throughout, not just near the beginning of the process. As a result of concern over this failure, various kinds of process-based teaching approaches are now being explored. However, to be practical in the usual situation where the university-bound student has very little time to learn how to write academic papers, a process-based approach must not be so loosely structured that the student becomes lost in the "method." This article outlines a relatively structured process approach which seeks to present composing as a complex, systematic whole by using a series of stages, each of which interacts within itself and with the other stages in any order any number of times. The construct thus gives both freedom and direction to the student in learning.

The approach to teaching composition to be outlined in this article is intended for advanced level students who need to learn to write the kinds of expository essays and compositions that are required in the U.S. university. The approach regards composing as a complex organic whole and utilizes as a teaching device a series of stages, each of which is seen as having two constantly interacting faces--thinking and writing; the stages are additive and operate recursively rather than sequentially.

THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

This formulation addresses several theoretical, methodological, and practical considerations in one dynamic construct. First, research on what the composing process is like, for both first language and second language writers, has confirmed what proficient writers and composition teachers have probably known all along--that composing is a very complex, nonlinear, recursive process involving false moves, backtracking, expansions, and invention, and that the generation of ideas and the generation of text interact throughout the process (Watson 1982, Zamel 1983, Spack 1984). Yet textbooks may give the impression that composing is a fairly straightforward, linear process. Students may conclude that they should be able to sit down and write complete papers from first page to last page, everytime, after some initial planning. When they find that they cannot do so, they think they are abnormal. They are not, of course, and the approach to be presented here is designed to give the student some sense of that fact.

Second, there is the troublesome question of how to introduce the student to the use of the conventions which operate in the presenting of ideas in academic writing. That there is a need for the student to learn to handle the conventions of textbuilding is evident to anyone who has

ever read the first academic-style compositions written by advanced ESL students. It appears that the foreign student has not yet developed the sorts of "intuition" (Irmscher 1979:33) possessed by the skilled writer about the interaction of ideas with the conventions for their presentation in textual form. Although this situation is no doubt primarily due to a lack of exposure to and experience in writing American academic prose, there is the further complication that the conventions for text building are, to some extent, culturally established and hence to varying degrees culture specific (Kaplan 1983). Thus, it may not be that the foreign student has no intuitions about the conventions for expressing meaning in text, but rather that the intuitions are inappropriate for the setting represented by the U.S. university. In that setting, of course, our students' papers must meet the academic reader's expectations by fulfilling certain conventions of content, logic, organization and development, expression, and form to a reasonable degree. Jotting down ideas on paper does not constitute American academic prose; there are constraints imposed by the expectation on the part of the reader as to how the ideas will be presented and explored. If the expectation is not fulfilled, communication will be weakened: the history teacher will not be able to follow the ideas.

Unfortunately, however, many of the methods used to teach composition seem not to work very well in helping the student internalize the conventions of text creation. Static descriptions of what a composition is like, or models for imitation, usually fail to engage the student in an active composing process in any systematic way, so that there is often little real mastery of the conventions that were supposed to have been practiced.

In addressing this need for ESL students to learn to handle conventions of text building, the construct used in my approach attempts to get the student to see that conventions arise out of the need for communication and that, as such, they are linked to discovery and thinking: they are not independent entities existing in a vacuum but enter into the complexities of composing which were noted earlier.

Finally, there is the methodological and motivational consideration that for an approach to work the student must be able to feel that it works. Typically, that amounts to saying that the student needs to feel that it both provides a sense of direction and offers some degree of freedom. Too much of either usually leads to student frustration. In my teaching approach, the stages and their parts provide points of reference so that the student never feels lost; at the same time, certain intentional omissions in the internal formulation of the stages and the almost infinite variety in the ways the student can utilize them recursively allows for individual variability.

THE NATURE OF THE APPROACH

My approach, then, centers around a series of eight procedural stages--basically an heuristic or teaching device, which addresses two main concerns: the need for the student to engage in composing as a complex, nonlinear discovery or problem solving process where thought interacts with expression at every stage; and the need for the student to learn in some systematic way, as part of the composing process itself, what the parameters of the conventions for text building are in the U.S. academic setting. The eight stages are each composed of two facets--a Thinking portion and a Writing portion, which constantly interact with one another; the stages are additive and interact with one another recursively. The total construct can be represented in the following rough schematic form, in which all lines are to be read as bidirectional arrows.

Stage	Thinking	Writing
1	Think (a)for invention, (b)for communication	Write a thesis sentence
2	Think (a)for invention, (b)for communication	Write a set of topic sentences
3	Think (a)for invention, (b)for communication	Write supporting sentences
4	Think (a)for invention, (b)for communication	Add to the supporting sentences to improve them
5	Think (a)for invention, (b)for communication	Add links between paragraphs
6	Think (a)for invention, (b)for communication	Add links within paragraphs, if necessary re-ordering elements
7	Think (a)for invention, (b)for communication	Write an opener for the paper
8	Think (a)for invention, (b)for communication	Write a closing paragraph

The Thinking facet of each stage is intended to direct the student toward discovering, generating, or creating meaning. To this end, the full versions of the Thinking facets, to be presented in the next section, are formulated as questions--questions of two types. The first questions simply attempt to get the student started thinking. The second type asks the writer to think further, to go beyond personal meaning to discover how to make that meaning accessible to a reader.

The Writing facet of each stage asks for written expression of the inventions coming out of the Thinking activities, asks the student to write segments of the actual paper. Each is formulated as an explicit direction for what the student must write.

The Thinking and the Writing facets are inextricably linked in this model. They interact repeatedly so that a think-write-rethink-rewrite sequence emerges, and sometimes they no doubt operate simultaneously. In fact, the writing conventions represented by the Writing directions are seen as arising from the thinking that a writer must do in order to discover how to make meaning accessible to a reader, which is the second kind of thinking included in each Thinking facet. It is important to note that the very precise, almost prescriptive formulation of the Writing directions helps to make the link between Writing and Thinking dynamic. That is, upon realizing that some element asked for in a Writing direction is missing or inaccurate, the student thinks again, usually ending up considering how to make meaning clearer to the reader.

The eight stages are additive. By working through them all, the student will end up with a composition.

Finally, the stages interact with one another, any number of times, and in any order, not necessarily sequentially. About all that can be said

about the sequencing of the eight stages is that in general the first three precede the last five in the actual process of composing.

Overall, the construct gives the freedom to rethink and to revise constantly--the freedom to change direction. Yet it also provides clearcut and demanding points of reference throughout. The process in application is a dynamic one, since it is both systematic and flexible.

THE EIGHT STAGES

The sketch which follows provides some feeling for what each of the stages is like, offers an indication of the sorts of activities that the student and teacher can engage in for each, and points out the most likely ways that the stages will interact recursively.

First Stage, Thinking:

(a) What topic do I care about? What is the main idea or feeling I have about this topic? What is the important thing to me about it? What do I want to say, really?

(b) How can I make the point I want to make for my reader?

First Stage, Writing:

Write down this main idea as a thesis sentence. That is, write a declarative sentence that makes a single, clear, direct, restricted statement that both requires proof, illustration, or explanation and is capable of being proved, illustrated or explained. This sentence will be part of the actual composition, usually appearing near the beginning.

The function of the first stage overall is to encourage discovery of a main idea and to ask that it be examined and then stated for a reader. For the Thinking portion, many of what are commonly called pre-writing techniques for generating topics and ideas and for narrowing them down can be explored and experimented with--e.g. brainstorming, listing, class discussions, talking it out with a peer, free writing, and heuristics such as question sets. Some students may even produce as early as this what Flower has called "Writer-Based prose," writing that is essentially addressed inward, to the writer, and which does not attempt exchange with a reader (1981). Practicing several of these techniques in class is useful and probably necessary, since different writers may use quite different thinking techniques, and even the same writer may want to use different strategies at different times, depending on the writing task.

For the Writing portion, the use of sample student responses can be very effectively used, particularly if care is taken to link the discussion back to the Thinking questions. Students can examine items such as (1)-(10) and paired items such as (11) and (12) and can discover what it is about each that violates the convention represented by the Writing direction, and, more important, why that in turn causes a recycling back to the Thinking portion. That is, by violating the elements of the Thinking direction in the ways indicated in brackets, the writer has failed either to discover for himself what the main idea is or has failed to take into account the reader's need to be able to comprehend what is meant. For example, in item (7), the student still has to think to decide what it is about "education" that is of importance to him, whereas in (5) the writer will have to think to discover how to let the reader know what "amazing" really means here.

1. The absent-mindedness of Professor Smith. [not a sentence]
2. How absent-minded Professor Smith was! [not declarative]
3. Why was Professor Smith so absent-minded? [not a statement]
4. Professor Smith was handsome and absent-minded. [not single]
5. Professor Smith was amazing. [not clear]
6. This paper will discuss Professor Smith's casual behavior. [not direct]
7. Education in the U.S. offers many opportunities. [not restricted]
8. Professor Smith was often late to class. [does not require proof; factual]
9. Professor Smith was the most absent-minded teacher ever to teach at Georgetown. [not capable of reasonable proof; too absolute]
10. Professor Smith's casual behavior irritated many students.
11. The structure of DNA
    Working at McDonald's last summer
    [not statements/sentences]

    DNA has a double helix structure.
    Working at McDonald's last summer taught me self-discipline.
12. My roommate is unique.
    Biology is interesting.
    [not clear]

    My roommate is disorganized.
    Biology reveals the mysteries of the living cell.

In contrast, items like (10), those in the second half of (11) and (12), and (13) do measure up moderately well, something which the students readily discover by working through the first stage.

13. Agrarian society constituted a major change from earlier horticultural societies.
    All neurotic disorders have anxiety as a central characteristic.
    Chemical-physical factors in the body control ventilation.

* * * *

Second Stage, Thinking:

(a) What are the main reasons I think my central idea is true? Why do I think it is important? What are the main points about it that make it engaging for me? What makes it worth talking about?

(b) How can I show that my main idea is true or important to my reader? What are the main things I can tell him?

Second Stage, Writing:

Write down your answers to these considerations in a series of a few sentences. That is, write at least three or four sentences about the thesis you have come up with, clearly and directly about the whole of it, its whole claim, not just about a topic in it. Each should help show that the point you made in your thesis is a reasonable claim in one important way. You will usually use each of the sentences you write as a topic sentence to open each paragraph or major section in your paper.

Check that the three sentences each makes a significant point, that they are about equal in importance, and that they are parallel in their approach to the thesis--i.e. that they do not overlap one another. This means that often they will all answer the same question--e.g. why? with what results? where when? under what conditions? who? for whom? how? to what extent? etc.

The function of the second stage is to encourage the discovery of structure underlying the thesis and to ask for a written statement of it. For the Thinking portion, many of the pre-writing techniques mentioned earlier are helpful, particularly the use of questions to get the student thinking. The teacher preferably should <u>not</u> present pre-formed organizational patterns, but should let the students generate their own structure.

For the Writing portion, student generated responses can be examined to see if the convention represented by the Writing direction has been addressed. Thus, set (14) is acceptable, but (15) is not (the categories overlap.) And neither is (16), for its last topic sentence pertains only to a topic, Sesame Street, in the thesis and not to the claim that children learn something from it--an error which accounts for many a paper that seems to wander aimlessly.

14. Thesis: I feel like I am three different people, I act so differently with different people.
    1. In front of my conservative parents, I am a well-behaved Chinese adolescent, demure and obedient.
    2. With my best friend I am a wild and crazy person, who can stand up and defend herself.
    3. With Americans I do not know well, I am a reserved, almost unfriendly person.

15. Thesis: Smoking can be dangerous to the smoker's health.
    1. Smoking may aggravate tuberculosis.
    2. Smoking may cause cancer.
    3. Smoking may cause lung disorders.

16. Thesis: "Sesame Street" increases children's general knowledge.
    1. Children learn to differentiate symbolic representations.
    2. They start learning about the social environment.
    3. Children are taught some basic facts about the physical world.
    4. "Sesame Street" is broadcast on two channels in this area.

Once again, it is important to constantly recycle back into the Thinking questions as such activities are done, to bring out, for instance that item (15) probably means that the writer's thoughts are not yet sorted out. Going back to the first stage is quite likely, as well, if the student discovers that the original thesis no longer reflects the meaning subsumed by his topic sentences.

* * * *

Third Stage, Thinking:

(a) What are some of the things that made me think of my main points (topic sentences)? What do I really mean by each point? What do I feel and see about each topic sentence?

(b) How can I explain to my reader what I mean by each topic sentence? How can I show what I feel? How can I show each one is true?

Third Stage, Writing:

Keeping these thoughts in mind, write down a series of sentences for each of your topic sentences. That is, write at least five or six sentences about each topic sentence--clearly and directly about its basic point. They should explore what you know about the point made in the topic sentence and should show, "prove," illustrate or explain its point to a reader. These sentences will serve as supporting sentences within the paragraphs of your composition. [You will now have the basic structure of a composition, a skeleton paper, but it is not yet complete.]

The function of the third stage is to allow the student to discover within and then to express for a reader significant ideas about each major point. To encourage discovery, pre-writing activities such as lists and talking with a real reader are helpful. For the Writing segment, it is probably advisable to avoid giving any illustrative modes at all, or at

least not until the students have done considerable writing of their own support. The whole point of the third stage is to get the student to generate and express original material, not to imitate.

Recursiveness should also be encouraged at this stage. Clearly, if the sentences generated as paragraph support turn out to be compelling but to have no relation to the points identified in the topic sentences, students can recycle back to the second stage, rethink the major points, and revise the topic sentences.

* * * *

Fourth Stage, Thinking:

(a) Is this all? Have I included all I feel? All that I see? All the reasons I think the topic sentence is true in each case? Or have I left something important out? Have I explored and discovered my claims fully?

(b) How can I make what I have written really reflect what I mean? How can I evoke in the reader the picture that I see myself?

Fourth Stage, Writing:

Keeping your answers to these questions in mind, revise and add to your support. That is, re-do the supporting sentences, adding missing ideas and making the sentences as precise, specific, and concrete as is reasonable for the intended meaning. You can accomplish this by adding examples, anecdotes, statistics, facts, and details; you can also do it by constructing a detailed analysis, explanation, or argument within the paragraph.

You can usually do the fourth writing stage either by substituting a more detailed version for your original supporting sentence or by adding details following your original supporting sentence. You may end up with four or five sentences for every one you had before!

Keep in mind that your purpose is to show your reader that your topic sentence makes a reasonable claim; so make the support for it as clear and vivid for him as it is to you. Ask yourself, "Can the reader really see what I see when I say this, or do I need to give him more information?"

The fourth stage seeks clarification of the student's own thought and a fuller realization that writing for oneself is not necessarily the same as writing for a reader; it also asks the student to do something to the support to achieve a corresponding clarification for the reader. Getting students to realize that what is clear to them is not necessarily clear to the reader is often particularly hard so that techniques such as peer reading and questioning are valuable tools.

As for the Writing portion at the fourth stage, unlike the third stage, considerable work with various of the techniques suggested in the formulation can help, though such work must be structured so that direct imitations cannot occur. For instance, students can readily see that (17a) is not as "real" as (17b), which is a more detailed and specific version which can be substituted for it, and that (18a) is not as compelling as is (18b), which would be added following (18a) to explicate its point. Exercises asking students to write improved versions like the (b) items are helpful.

17a. Our child is usually dirty.

b. Our son John usually has dried food around his mouth and has on a shirt with juice dribbles down the front and pants with grass stains and mud on the knees.

18a. Bill's clothing is often mismatched.
b. For example, yesterday he wore a pair of ragged green denim jeans with a brand new red silk shirt.

Also helpful is a little work actively constructing a multi-stage argument, explanation, or description, where the arrangement of the elements is what is important, with attention being given to making it comprehensible to a reader.

* * * *

Fifth Stage, Thinking:
(a) What is the logical relation between my main points (i.e. between the points represented by the topic sentences)?
(b) How can I show that relation to the reader?
Fifth Stage, Writing:
Indicate what the relations are by adding to each of your topic sentences a word or phrase which refers to the idea of the body paragraph which precedes. That is, use transitionsor other linking devices in the topic sentences to clearly link your paragraphs to one another.

You may use a short transition or linkage, or a combination of a short transition word or phrase plus a phrase summarizing the content of the preceding paragraph.

This stage brings to the conscious level the fact that the parts of the paper are organically related in some way, and then asks that the relation be expressed for the reader. To help with the Thinking aspect, the teacher may want to elicit from the class a survey of what sorts of logical relations may exist between a pair of ideas, perhaps by using sentence pairs, and the linguistic forms commonly used to express each relation. To get at the Writing aspect, a set or two like (19) can be provided and then the students can go back to their earlier papers to rewrite the topic sentences.

19. Thesis: "Sesame Street" increases children's general knowledge.
1. Children learn to differentiate symbolic representations.
2. Moreover, they start learning about the social enyironment.
3. In addition to learning about the social environment, children are taught some basic facts about the physical environment.

This stage may sometimes cause the student to reconsider the second stage (topic sentences) and sometimes the first stage (the thesis) and to revise their wording so that the logical relations involved are more clearly expressed.

* * * *

Sixth Stage, Thinking:
(a) What are the relations between the parts of my explanation for each major point--i.e. between the sentences within each paragraph?
(b) Have I expressed myself such that the reader will see the relations as well as I do?
Sixth Stage, Writing:
Check each supporting sentence within each paragraph to see that it has a reasonable relation to the one preceding it and that it contains one or more words or expressions which link it to or which refer back to the preceding supporting sentence or sentences. If necessary, re-order the sentences to make their relation to one another more accurate. Add linking devices such as transitions, pronouns, repeated words, word substitutes, etc. Your aim is to make each sentence "flow" into the next one.

This stage asks the student to reexamine the paragraph support for logical sequencing and for clear internal links. In actuality, little usually needs to be done with Thinking because for the most part other stages have already touched on the quality of the support (fourth stage) and on logical relations (fifth stage). However, in its Writing aspect, some students discover for the first time that transitions are only one of many ways that language can link consecutive sentences. For example, in (20), every word in the second sentence refers back to something in the first.

20. We asked Bill to come to the party. However, he refused our invitation.

* * * *

Seventh Stage, Thinking:

(a) How did I get into this subject? Why did it strike me? Is there any particular instance of it that particularly impressed me?

(b) How can I use those points to lead the reader into my main idea?

Seventh Stage, Writing:

Add an opener to your paper, one which includes something arresting enough to make the reader want to read the paper, perhaps because it lets the reader know that it treats an important issue, perhaps because it catches his attention, perhaps because it arouses his interest. To do this, you might use an anecdote, striking facts or statistics, a quotation, a contradiction of some sort, background information to establish significance of the issue--or anything else arresting.

The opener will normally occur with the thesis in the first paragraph of the paper--i.e. in an introduction.

Eighth Stage, Thinking:

(a) Why did I write on this thesis? Why was it important? What have I discovered in the process?

(b) How can I use such considerations to leave my reader with a sense of having read a significant, complete piece?

Eighth Stage, Writing:

Add a closing paragraph to your paper, one which gives the reader the sense that the paper is finished. You can do this by using one or more of the following: a restatement of the thesis, a mention of whatever was included in the opener, a brief summary--or anything else that gives the sense of completion.

These two stages, which can usually be treated together, ask the student to consider why the main point of the paper was significant and then to use that discovery for more effective expression and communication. Rather than giving the students any examples, the ideal is to let the Thinking generate original, arresting openers and closings, as illustrated by the portion of an opener given in (21).

21. Guided somehow by instinct, I finally found my room. My roommate was still awake reading. "Did you go swimming in a brewery?" were the last words I heard that night ....

* * * *

To sum up, the result of working through all eight stages, which is accomplished over the course of about seven weeks by introducing and working through a stage at a time and then, beginning with the third stage, requiring a composition reflecting the operation of all the stages covered up to the point of the stage being worked on--i.e. through a series of five or so compositions, will be an organized, focused, developed short composition.

The construct of the eight stages, however, constitutes only part of the course design. The stages, it will have been noticed, did not include editing in the narrow sense of the term. The approach used makes a crucial distinction between revising and editing. Revising is an inherent part of the process represented by the stages. Editing is reserved for quite late in the preparation of each paper, after most of the composing process is complete. Secondly, it is necessary to make clear that the eight stages generate only a basic composition, one with one-level of division in the organizational pattern. However, by the last third or so of the semester, the students quite readily begin to put together two or more such pieces of prose to write longer academic papers. At this stage, the students can be led to see that certain classes of ideas logically consist of two faces which constitute a single reality (e.g. cause and effect; concession; similarity and contrast, etc.) and that such ideas very commonly generate a longer paper consisting of two shorter pieces of prose, two sections, each quite similar to the simple composition generated by the stages. Item (22) presents examples of the sort of thesis that results.

22. Tagore's idea of education, although based on the rediscovery of Indian tradition, also included innovations that were not traditional.

    Reagan's practices of delegating authority and of reading only short, staff-prepared memos resulted in an efficient gubernatorial operation in California.

Besides that sort of expansion, most students by the end of the course have developed enough of a sense of the parameters of acceptability to respond satisfactorily to suggestions that they try to adapt and expand upon the stages a bit. The possession of that sense constitutes the final "stage."

The approach outlined in this article clearly uses certain of the elements that constitute the shared knowledge of composition teachers, elements that we have all seen elsewhere, notably in textbooks in various forms. For example, I am indebted to any number of texts for ideas relating to the use of a step-by-step process approach (Kerrigan 1974, Shoemaker 1985, Winkler and McCuen 1984, Blum, Brinkman, Hoffman, and Peck 1984, Renfro 1985, Ross and Doty 1985). Clearly, the conventions covered by the stages are included in nearly every composition text for this level and often in nearly the same order. What is different about the approach described here is the extent to which it integrates a large number of elements into a whole that allows for great flexibility of application while still remaining systematic.

The success rate is gratifying. By seven to ten weeks into the course, virtually all students are able to write cogent papers--sometimes touching or passionate ones, and sometimes, as might be expected given the kinds of papers typically required in the university, papers showing exploration and skillful integration of academic concepts or ideas.

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TEACHING "WRITING" TO ESL STUDENTS:

A PROCESS-BASED APPROACH

> It is the end of the semester! I am writing and editing now. It is amazing how confortable I feel now about my writing, thanks to the good process of "Free Writing".

These the words (and spellings) of a Costa Rican student I'll call Felicia are the lead to an essay she entitled "Nine Out of One." In it she traced her growth as a writer and the development of an earlier handwritten, half-page freewrite first into a story, then a narrative, and finally a nine-page (single-spaced) expository essay on writing. I cite Felicia's experience because it is typical of what students write in the "process logs" all keep for my class. "Nine Out of One" continues:

> When I went to register for English 100 [George Mason's English 101 alternative for non-native speakers], I thought that my English grammar, pronunciation and communication was going to be better after all. I took some Grammar books to refresh my knowledge, so I wouldn't look like a donkey in front of all the class. What I didn't realize was the way I am learning all at once: vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, communication and composition. All these are included in a simple key, "Free Writing".

Felicia had discovered what good writers have always known and what linguists (Krashen, 1978, 1982) have begun to explain--the fact that writers cannot attend to all language features at a time, cannot focus attention on structure and meaning at once. That insight, which Felicia came to in my class, forms the foundation of the "writing" courses I teach. I begin by teaching students to freewrite, saying "Just write quickly, concentrating on what you're trying to say. You can go back and fix it up after you get a draft."

Earlier in the semester Felicia hadn't known about freewriting and, like most students who've been taught a lot of structure and rules but few writing strategies, she was anxious about making grammatical mistakes.

> The time to attend the first English Class came. I remember getting near the room that they assigned us. I was going to pass by only, but I saw all this bunch of foreign people. "Oh, good! They must have a strong accent and probably they make grammar mistakes too, so I am not going to be the only one!"

With most of my students, such fear of evaluation leads to dependence on error-avoidance strategies that produce stiff, convoluted, formulaic, and often boring prose. A result of playing it safe in subject matter and in form, such writing reveals a fear of error that prevents students from trying anything new and therefore from learning anything new about how to write. I try to reverse this pattern.

I divide the writing course into three major sections--getting it down (drafting), getting it right (revising) and checking it out (fine-tuning and editing). Though we never stick rigidly to these divisions, I emphasize strategies for the these phases of writing during the appropriate section of the term. First I help students develop fluency by encouraging them to try out

lots of topics, write freely without worry about form for the time being, and identify what is good about their work.

Next, when students feel confident pointing out what they like in each others' writing and can show each other potential for development in drafts, I put them in small groups and train them to help each other make their papers better. The training consists of such things as modeling my own revision strategies, passing around (and answering questions about) multiple drafts of my own articles, giving them the kinds of responses that help me write more easily, having students write about and then discuss their writing problems so others will know how to help them, and drawing attention to the helpful comments they spontaneously make to each other. (Actually, this training begins the first day of class; it is after they are comfortable with these processes that I put them in small groups.) For a total of a half-hour or so before first breaking into groups, students "thinkwrite" for five minutes about what they need from their peers, then read and discuss their thinkwrites. This may be done two or three times during the semester as the focus of learning shifts from fluency to revision to editing for publication. Including class and small-group participation as a significant portion of the final grade motivates serious participation.

Next, when students have taken two or three favorite papers through several drafts, successfully incorporating some suggestions made by their friends, they begin to edit draft after typed draft of their favorite pieces and to monitor closely, invoking their knowledge of rules to correct mistakes. Finally, they compile their best pieces for publication in a class book.

Grammar and mechanics, then, are dealt with incidentally as problems arise in papers, and I follow three guidelines for deciding what to teach each student when. I focus on easily learned features, on highly stigmatized mistakes, and on problems students know how to find in their work. Since we can't possibly cover every rule in the book (and since memorizing rules doesn't help students learn to apply them anyway), I don't feel guilty if I have to leave a few things for them to teach themselves--especially since I've given them lots of (guided) practice looking up and discussing handbook rules in the group.

This method of teaching writing is modeled on how writers (myself included) write; on recent discoveries about students' writing and learning processes; and on theories of language undergirding the field of English Education. Influenced by my months of research observing writers who teach, it also draws on research in first and second language acquisition. My goals are to help students separate and sequence writing tasks and to let them practice writing strategies until they become familiar, then natural, and eventually, intuitively controlled.

Actually, these goals may sound familiar, but "writing" is quite different from what are usually called "composition" approaches. "Writing" works with whole pieces students choose to write. It's "content" is taught incidentally. And to succeed, the teacher must emphasize strengths rather than deficiencies. Felicia described her first impression of my "writing" approach:

> "In this Class you'll be writing like crazy! If you don't like it, you'd better drop the course now. Don't worry about grammar. Don't worry

about spelling, just write and write, this is going to be Free Writing!" our teacher said with a nice Southern accent. I took a deep breath.

Felicia's feelings of relief soon vanished. She'd forgotten about editing:

> Our teacher didn't mention anything about "Editing Essays". That came as a surprise, just about when I was ready to believe that English 100 is a good gift from George Mason University.

Caught by surprise, by the new process of freewriting (turning down the monitor), by subsequent urging from classmates to write more interestingly (turning down the censor) and finally by the realization that writers revise and edit repeatedly, Felicia captured her feelings of frustration in the cartoon that accompanied her essay in the class book. Still, she grew motivated and confident. Her work received many positive comments from her writing group and me. So different was our habit of focusing on strengths, however, that she was again caught caught off guard when a positive comment made her aware of <u>weaknesses</u> in a piece:

> Well, I was writing and writing. Almost every time that I got my papers back, right in the top, I could see these good remarks: "Excellent!, Please read it to the Class, very vivid writing. wonderful details! Show, don't tell, can you tell us some more about this?" Obviously, the word "Excellent" made me feel very good, because at the beginning I was very afraid of my writing. But it was just incredible. Very soon, and under these motivations, I learned that a topic that is boring or stupid for the student is usually excellent and interesting for the teacher and the rest of the Class.

Felicia's initial definition of "boring" as writing about topics she knew about was common, but soon she discovered that such topics were invariably interesting to her class. Students almost always assume the opposite, because--I think--they are used to being assigned impersonal topics. Requiring students who are not yet writers to write only about abstract or "controversial" issues implies that their own interests are worthless or boring and alienates them from their desire to communicate well. Felicia's class confirmed for each other that their experience was a rich resource: They applauded papers with an honest voice, papers which evoked empathy. Felicia also liked the supportive, collaborative atmosphere:

> Thus, just by listening to some other stories, we all got very enthusiastic and it was like being in a marathon without being in a competition.

Growing motivation made students hungry for technique, and they gave constructive criticism, always allowing the writer final decisions about a piece.

> After about three weeks of classes, we were introduced to dialogues, and of course, that was more exciting. When someone didn't complete the description of a certain situation, we did ask about it, leaving the writer the responsibility to write more and more, to complete what he first mentioned.

Soon the class felt confident about what good writing was and about what almost-good writing needed to improve:

GOOD. Put it in as a scene. Show! don't tell !...
Explain. Put in conversation. Make it VIVID !.
Add some details. Build it up... (?)
Convert it in a good ESSAY !
Go back. Revise, E D I T !
WHO MADE UP ALL THESE RULES?. I want to go back to my country!.

We learned to push the writer to develop an incomplete but interesting topic, like instead of just saying, "...and after that I went to the movies..." the writer was writing, "...and after eating dinner and enjoying all my family reunion and conversation, I went to see a movie named 'the Green Mountains of Seattle' that is about ..."

Felicia gave a personal example to elaborate her point:

> There is an example of this process of free simple writing with the results of an Essay. It happened to me. On January 24, 1983 [the first week of the semester], I wrote this:
>
> "A time when my feelings were hurt
>
> I remember once when my feelings were really hurt. It was about five years ago, when a co-worker was trying to bring down my reputation as a good assistant of my boss. For some reason that I ignore, I didn't like this person, whom I believe, has a lot of conplexes about herself.
>
> Without my knowledge, she did a lot of disgusting things to make everybody believe or have the wrong idea about the way I was conducting the Office. She has enough imagination and time to create dark shades about my personality.
>
> The above mentioned story on which I did work very hard to make interesting, came back to me with notes from my teacher, that made me feel very bad....Within some of her notes, I could see something that made me feel a cold sensation all over my skin. "Read to class. Excellent example of a great but underdeveloped topic" ....

Though she had not yet consciously revised her definition of "boring," my criticism motivated Felicia to take a risk in this piece:

> Since it was almost the beginning of the semester, one day I sat down to write just another story, another Homework, but right in front of me, I had what my teacher gave me. Again I was reading those comments. The words that were bothering me the most, were, "underdeveloped topic". So finally I decided to remember step by step about the time when my feelings were hurt. "It is going to be very personal and maybe boring, but I have to develop this story! Nobody else can. I am the only one in this Class who can write all about it!" I thought. And here is the result:

Here Felicia inserted the text of her often revised narrative as evidence of how she learned to write with confidence. By reflecting on her experience, she had produced a thoughtful essay. "A Time When My Feelings Were Hurt" began with a formal introduction:

> Throughout human History, people have sought the most effective ways to change the beliefs, attitudes and behavior of others. Social interaction can produce, somehow, great changes in the way people can think and act. From my personal experience I can tell that there is no one specific age to determine whether a person can continue with the same way to see and take the world. For example I used to be different. I did believe that bad intentioned people were only in the imagination of some writers, to

produce dramatic situations, or in some ethnic groups, where education was unknown. These beliefs, regarding badness in people, were very honest until the day that a co-worker hurt my feelings.

Felicia told how, five years earlier, a co-worker tried to destroy her reputation by distributing copies of confidential reports taken from Felicia's files. Felicia had been too naive to question the woman's behavior but described it from memory, skillfully foreshadowing her story's inevitable conclusion. Introducing the villain, however, she reveals her biases.

> I remember when I met her. Her name is Eva. She was in the Office for three months before they hired me. Pretty rude, she just said "hi". I noticed that her manners were not the best. She got up from her desk and went to the next door, saying "I have to go to the bathroom." Fat and ugly. With ordinary dentures, oily flat hair, and some nail enamel on her finger nails. Her features were typical of a Latin American Indian, big-rounded dark face, flat-big nose and pronounced cheek bones.

The piece led to responses from Felicia's group and motivated other essays illustrating other attitudes. I did not know this at the time, for Felicia never showed me this particular piece. (I read it first in Voices from Across Cultural Borders, the inch-thick book her class published at the end of the term.) The fact that she decided to embed it, at the last minute, into an essay on writing accounts, I suppose, for some mechanical errors in the sections on writing. I never edit the pieces students put into their books, however; I read successive drafts, underline correct sections,and point out one or two glaring errors in each draft. Students are responsible for learning to edit for the book, and embarrassment when others spot errors is the penalty for carelessness.

> The days went on and the fight was initiated.... If I said "What a wonderful day!", she would say "You are wrong, today is humid and also it is supposed to rain, you had better pay attention to the weather report before you say such a stupid statement!" If I wore a nice dress that everybody liked, she would come at any unexpected moment to tell me how out of fashion the dress was.

Felicia developed a believable character through skillful choice of behavioral detail and vivid imagery. Control of mechanics relaxed during emotionally charged scenes, however, even as imagery and detail became powerful.

> Even though, I always avoided talking to her, she used to come to my desk very frequently. Her eyes were rapidly moving into my papers, like a spy trying to picture private archives in a matter of seconds. Doing two things at the same time, thinking that I wasn't aware of them; when she was talking to me, like saying, "You know that there is a good and cheap trip to Europe for only $600.00, don't you?" at the same time she was turning pages of confidential information that I had on my desk. If I stopped her, she would say, "Oh, I am sorry, I wasn't reading anything, that was just an unconscious gesture." And walking as sly as a fox, she would leave me alone.

Though the mechanics are imperfect, this piece was of special interest to me, for otherwise it was as strong as pieces to which I responded on many drafts.

Felicia found more than a good topic in her half-page freewrite. She learned to convert an experience into a powerful expository essay.

A Rationale for Teaching "Writing"

Now that Felicia has introduced you to my method, I'd like to describe its rationale. These are the assumptions about language and learning on which the approach is based. Several differ from traditional "composition" assumptions.

1. Writing like speaking is natural. Just as everyone learns to speak, everyone can learn to write. This includes ESL, dialect, and standard-speaking writers.

2. Language isn't mastered in isolation. We learn to write as we learn to speak--by interacting with others. That's why teachers need to provide a variety of readers for student writing.

3. Ability expands gradually but naturally when writers control what they write. People learn more surely, in other words, by writing what they want to write. Skill follows experience with real (not practice) writing.

4. Anxiety interferes with learning and with effective expression, so beginners need a safe atmosphere where they aren't penalized for making mistakes.

5. Writing experience is a dependable guide for teachers of writing: If what the text describes doesn't match how you write, you and your students are right to question its validity.

6. Writing can be used academically and personally to discover what we know and to figure out what we need to work on next.

For everyday use, I reduce these six assumptions to two workable rules of thumb. When faced with instruction-related decisions I ask myself two things:

> Is what I'm having students do consistent with how I write, or is it based on someone else's idea of "what English teachers ought to do"?
>
> Have I asked my students what they as writers need (and have I trusted their replies?), or am I retaining control by imposing what I want them to do?

The Content and Methods of One "Writing" Teacher

Course content is left up to the students, the only required text being the book they publish themselves. Writing is individual and learning to write is natural, so I observe what students' need at each step before I begin to teach. While training them to discover, by "thinkwriting," what they need to learn next, I establish the kind of writing community I as a writer need and tempt them to write by offering the rewards self-sponsored writing brings: publication, self-expression, clarity of thought, emotional release, pleasure at entertaining others, pride at a difficult job well done, and the like.

I teach all writing similarly--remedial writing, ESL writing, graduate courses. In fact, the small-group workshops my graduate students conduct in a

remedial writing center have served as the model for a doctoral writing support system being developed at George Mason, and I am training a writing specialist in small-group tutorial methods to help native-speaking and bilingual students write doctoral-level assignments.

- Though each course has two suggested strands, I treat writing from each strand the same way. One strand is academic writing, beginning with "writing to learn," in which students "thinkwrite" freely in learning logs about readings, problems, feelings or content associated with another course. I respond as an interested reader, interacting with their ideas, and make suggestions for further development of ideas they've explored. Students also keep process logs where they reflect on progress and problems with writing, reporting on successive drafts or asking for suggestions when problems arise. They also do thinkwrites to evaluate their progress and decide what to work on next.

The second strand, self-sponsored writing, usually has more appeal. Most students. like Felicia, begin with personal narrative but gradually burst into a variety of forms--poetry, short stories, complaint letters, and essays on injustice or strongly held beliefs--which provide most of the entries in the collections they produce. Felicia's essay on how she learned to develop a formal essay incorporated writing from both strands. So, in fact, did Emir's.

Here's how all writing gets handled:

I write with students, modeling attitudes, frustrations, successes, revision strategies, and writer talk.

Students are expected to discover their own uses for writing and to write for themselves--not to please me.

Students write daily, in class as well as at home.

Students separate and sequence writing tasks, turning down censor and monitor while drafting freely, then turning them up again to get papers ready for their intended readers.

Students control what they write about, what forms they write in, how much they write, and how much they revise and edit.

Students write for live readers whom they reach by small group sharing, posting their pieces on walls, reading drafts to the class, contributing to weekly mimeographed Excerpts from unrevised and unedited drafts, submitting to a class book near the end of the term, and holding a class reading and publication party during the scheduled exam period.

They read aloud in small groups and trade papers with writing partners.

Sharing and experimenting require a safe atmosphere, so I ban snide, thoughtless, or harshly-phrased criticism of writers or their work.

Students give supportive but constructive responses, using the PQP Guide as a model until they no longer need it: They listen before giving praise (P) to things they like, asking questions (Q) on intriguing or unclear points, and making suggestions for points to polish (P) or revise.

They comment on strengths and experiments such as interesting metaphors, naturally flowing language, vivid details, honest opinions, a spontaneous comparison and contrast structure, exploratory thinking about academic issues, breakthroughs in awareness, or a genre no one else has tried. They also point out sophisticated sentence structures, syntactic variety, appropriate punctuation, and correctly edited prose.

They revise and edit favorite papers for publication in a class book.

Each student gets a single grade, given at the end of the term and based on such features as quantity of writing; improvement; seriousness/hard work; risks taken in content and form; the thoughtfulness/thoroughness/truthfulness of learning logs; number of finished products; correctness of book entries; improvement in using various error-correcting strategies like writing the way they speak, listening to their writing, and visually scanning typed drafts; the amount and effectiveness of revision and editing done; the quality of class participation and of help given others; and their part in producing the class book.

How Less Advanced ESL Students Respond to "Writing"

I've characterized how I (and many teachers of native-speakers) teach "writing" in college-level classrooms. In addition, my graduate students use a similar approach in the required, basic-writing program I direct. Below are as-yet unrevised "freewrites" by tutorial center ESL students who've been studying "writing" two hours a week in small, non-credit writing workshops. I took these quotes from the October 10th edition of the weekly Excerpts, distributed the week I presented these remarks at the 1984 WATESOL convention. They illustrate as-yet unedited, unrevised, self-selected writing by remedial ESL writers during the fifth week of fall semester. Below, a Malaysian student starts correctly, freewriting much the way he speaks. Correctness deteriorates slightly as he goes deep into troubling thoughts; this regression is compensated for, however, by a strong personal voice, natural rhythms, and vivid details. This student will revise and edit carefully with his group's help if he chooses to publish this piece:

> It was about 5:00 o'clock. I was sitting on the window with a warm cup of coffee. Outside, wind was blowing the rain all over the place. It was foggy. There is no pedestrian. I could not see far because of the fog. I wrapped a blanket around me and took a sip of coffee. That afternoon brought back lots of my memories. I was thinking of my own future. Why am I struggling with my life so much? I was thinking when I will finish my study and become a engineer. Then I can depend on my self and help my parents.

The next freewrite also has some errors, but some are errors this student can probably correct. I think so because correct spellings ("ringing") and verb endings (past participial) appear elsewhere in the piece. I also know that most students can catch omitted words (see carets) just as I catch them, by reading aloud while editing. The misused possessive is a good example of overgeneralizing a rule; it's correctly formed but used where the average American wouldn't use it. Notice how freewriting again produces a strong, personal voice, natural English-sounding rhythms throughout large portions of the piece, and an engaging sensory immediacy that elicits empathy.

> Rang, Rang, Rang...The alarm clock was ringing. I got up and [^] still. Then I sat back on my bed. I looked at the clock. It was only 5:00 a.m. I mumbled [^] myself that this was too early to get up. I still felt so sleepy. I looked at the clock again and began to lie down on my bed. My eyes were close but my brain was not. I was thinking to make a choice for myself. Either I got up and studied for my math's quiz or went back to sleep and got bad grade for not studying. God, I hated myself. I should have studied for it last night and didn't have to worry about it this early in the morning. I got to do it, I knew.

Distributed weekly, the Excerpts reward strong passages and provide diverse models at the approximate level of the students involved. Though unmonitored, they reveal the fluency basic ESL students develop in five weeks. By this time the instructional focus is shifting from fluency to revision: These are the last writings to go into Excerpts without revision. Another five weeks and both emphasis and excerpt standards will have shifted again--to editing for publication and gaining mastery of grammatical and mechanical rules.

Here are some process logs, published in the same issue of Excerpts, which show what this semester's students thought of the program after about five weeks. Process logs are focused freewrites on how writing is going which, when read, help listeners individualize their feedback to each other. They also help the writer focus on what she is learning and identify what she needs to work on next. This one confirms our research team's finding that control of their language decisions motivates basic writers.

> This class is a great motivator. It only asks us to write what we want to write, therefore people are more inclined to write outside of class. At first I was a little insulted by the class. I didn't like the idea to be required to take this class. I thought only on the negative aspect that I couldn't write. But I kept trying to tell myself to look on the positive side....I will probably continue going to CTC even if I get certified. I like small groups and I like being tutored. I feel the tutor is more interested in my work than a regular teacher is. Besides I need help in writing & I want to be good at it because I enjoy writing.

A Vietnamese girl's process thinkwrite leads her to a serious topic weighty enough to develop into an essay for an academic course. Words get left out from writing quickly, and punctuation is almost nonexistent, but articles and prepositions are becoming more natural from practice listening to the rhythms of her writing read aloud and there are no global convolutions to mask the intended meaning. Her tutor tells me that this student knows the rules (she's studied them for years) and can usually apply them during revision and editing. Any spots she's unsure of she can ask for help with later in group, using her own sentences to practice corrections after she elaborates and clarifies these ideas. As with this student, freewriting often smoothes out problems in students' prose; and just as often, it helps them find topics to develop into formal, academic papers. Here is another example:

> My mind just went blank, sometimes my thoughts all in a sudden just disappeared before I had a chance to put them down in a piece of paper. Everyone seemed occupying with their thinking once a while I wish I could somehow creep into people's mind to see what really going on in their heads. Some people can express theirself clearly and effectively, some can not, the different might be their genetic developments and I must

> also include culture, family and many other factors which determine one's ability. I wonder if they can do some experiments on what affect one's thinking potential from birth to adult. But if everyone has the same talent or the same process of thinking, one can substitute for another without any affect then individual will no longer an important of society as a whole.

In this freely written thinkwrite the student overcomes her usual problem of disappearing thoughts. In fact, she is thinking like a scientist, fielding tentative hypotheses and critically examining her own ideas. Elaborating the ideas in this piece could lead to an interesting formal essay, and students learn to recognize such potential in their writing with the help of others in their groups.

The Principle of Teaching Incidentally, at the Point of Need

Compared to "composition," teaching "writing" involves less direct teaching and lots of guiding students repeatedly through its various phases. This is done until drafting, revising and editing strategies become comfortable, natural, and (for some features and strategies) automatic. After weeks of practice applying constructive criticism and helping others in their groups revise and edit papers, students' awareness of strengths and weaknesses in their work increases. The questions they begin to ask about fine points are answered individually or with the whole class, depending on how many are having the same problem. Classes thus progress along a shifting scale of concerns in the course of a semester, with instruction focusing on those problems students become aware of in a draft, staying near the edges of students' current knowledge--what Krashen (1982) would call the "i = 1" level.

One way to be sure students learn what we teach is to offer answers when they have questions--by postponing direct instruction until after a draft is attempted. At this point, discussions emerge naturally from each writers' needs--to know their strengths, rules, ideas for cutting or expanding, ways to avoid an agreement error, alternatives for organization or punctuation, or strategies for revising a paper for a content-area course.

"Writing" is an organic approach which focuses on <u>strategies</u> students can apply to the academic, personal, or creative writing they do. Instruction is individual, responding to existing drafts, prompted by recognizable strengths and problems, and motivated by students' desire to publish engaging and correct pieces. It focuses on strengths more than on weaknesses so students will feel comfortable experimenting with new techniques and provides lots of practice critiquing each other's work. Once the pressure of first-draft evaluation decreases and students are writing more fluently, their language becomes more natural, more speech-like, and they begin to recognize their mistakes. They also begin to attend to some features intuitively. After weeks of practice freewriting, for example, students find themselves catching some errors as they draft, a phenomenon referred to by Felicia when she wrote:

> What I didn't realize was the way I am learning all at once: vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, communication and composition. All these subjects are included in a simple key, "Free Writing".

Let me quote another student, from Felicia's class, who also published a formal essay on learning to write. Emir, as I'll call him, chose this topic

when he noticed a contrast between his experience in my "writing" section of English 100 and his brother's experience, the same semester, with a "composition" section. The writing block Emir began with quickly disappeared, but Sharough continued to be "stopped." A comparison and contrast essay developed from a series of process logs and taken through a dozen drafts, Emir's "Confessions of a Free Writer" opens with a simile ("to get my readers interested") and employs the tone of a writer who knows whereof he speaks:

> As someone who can appreciate good jewelry because he knows about jewels, I can appreciate good writing because I have started learning how to write. No wonder my writing has never been good in any language. I always had to write about boring topics, such as, "What are the advantages and disadvantages of the television?" or "Is advertising important?"... My course, ENGL 100, has been the opportunity to write much better, and to discover how interesting I can be.
>
> I started by free writing. Since I was free to choose my topics, I took ones I liked and cared about. I had many ideas when I was writing about myself, my native country, and my experience. However, when back in high school my teacher asked me to write about very narrow and shallow topics, the kind of writing I was doing was also narrow and shallow. To give you a taste of this old style, I wrote the following lines about advertising and television. "Wonder woman is lovely and Superman is strong. I like the woman in Diet Pepsi's advertising, but I don't buy Pepsi."

Emir goes on to give examples of many things he was learning:

> By free writing I learned that good writing created images in the readers' mind. It was fun to discover how simple words put together could become powerful. [Emir inserted illustrations from his work here]
>
> Putting simple words together to get nice sentences was not enought, I had to be honest and take some risks. Judge by yourself: [passage here].
>
> I discovered by reading others' essays that good writing can relate ideas to what readers have already in mind [excerpt here]. Another important discovery through my reading was that good writing implies rather than giving statements. Since I try to do good writing let me imply by giving an example [inserts his experience reading a "fascinating" article in the Washington Post here]. This was a good piece of writing. When I was reading the article, I didn't hear my brother calling me.

Emir produced five single-spaced, typed pages describing what he learned and giving examples of his before and after writing. Here is another example:

> I also learned that good writing should give images, and include details. The images tickle our imagination, and the writing becomes more vivid. For instance, to describe a woman who had a flat tire on the beltway at 11 p.m., I could of course say, "Marie had a flat tire on the beltway at 11 p.m." By putting details, I could say it in a better way:
>
> > Marie was driving home, 495 was clear. The darkness of the night was sometimes disturbed by the other cars. Everything was going smoothly. She checked her speed. '55 miles per hour, it was okay,' thought Marie. The car's head lamps spotted the exit 7 to Fairfax

> Hospital. Suddenly, the engine's sound became louder, the car started pulling to the right. She got scared, "Oh, God! What's going on?' She took her foot off the accelerator and pushed the break pedal. The car started to decelerate. After 15 seconds that seemed 15 minutes to her, the car stopped. 'Ouf!' Her heart started to decelerate too. Marie turned on her emergency lights, and stepped out to check. The right front tire was flat. "Oh, S- - -!" said she giving a kick to the car.

Emir edited this piece repeatedly, testing phrases orally against his memory of how English sounds, examining every comma and prepositional phrase. Not until the conclusion did he contrast his brother's experience, stating his discovery that writing freely is much more than simple "freewriting."

Writing freely requires being free as a writer, free to take responsibility for your own ideas, to act as serious (or casual) as you feel about your work, to determine with the help of readers who aren't graders what to do to improve a piece. Without writing freely, students progress more slowly, for writing freely allows and requires students to make decisions for themselves--to take responsibility for the success or failure of their work. In Emir's words:

> Through freewriting I finally learned that the process of writing must be felt, pulled out of the brain rather than learned or taught. After one month and half of this English course, I got it! To write freely helps to learn writing. The other day I saw my brother trying to write his research paper. Every body in his class had to choose a topic for his or her research paper. Sharough--my brother--had chosen to write about the following topic, "What is matter?" Despite the fact the had chosen the topic and knew a little about it, he had a hard time with it. It was a broad topic with hundreds of books, and thousands of aspects to be explored. He spent more time reading technical books than writing. My brother didn't know much about this topic. Not only he had to absorb all this new information, but also write.

Emir had also learned that writing is individual and that learning to write must be separated from learning subject matter.

> Learning writing is not that easy, and when the beginner is asked to write about something he or she doesn't care about or does not know much about, the writing gets blocked.

Emir would make an excellent teacher, for he has examined his writing processes, testing the prescriptions of textbooks and teachers against what works for him. He redrafted his essay repeatedly, reconceptualizing his ideas each time rather than simply fine-tuning what he already had. When he became frustrated half-way through, uncertain which draft to choose, I suggested he go back and combine the best of each; when he did, he reoganized them. Though he'd received good grades on formulaic essays in other courses, Emir found no formula to adequately represent the complexity in what he had learned. "Confessions of a Free Writer" has a structure organically rooted in the shape of Emir's ideas, tempered by strategies to capture and keep his readers' attention, and modified by desire to make his main points memorable.

Relying on this experience with writing, Emir could advise Sharough confidently when premature concern for structure was blocking the flow of ideas.

> My brother was stopped. After hard work he found a nice sentence, but he did not want to write it down. He said: "Emir, this sentence belongs to the introduction." I had to explain: "Who cares about introduction, thesis, antithesis, and conclusion?! Just find your ideas, you will fix them later."

He had no trouble transferring the strategies practiced in my class to his brother's problem drafting a formal research paper on a topic from physics.

> He was stopped many times. I don't understand teachers who give research papers when the students don't yet know how to write about familiar topics. When something is strongly felt, words come out much easier.

After describing his brother's experience--both had been in the U.S. about one year--Emir summarized and concluded:

> The example of my brother and I is a good one. His knowledge of English was a little bit less than mine, but after half a semester with the same course but a different teacher, I'm in better shape. He is blocked, while I'm taking off from this land of prejudices on writing. Good writing is honest writing, good writing expresses strong feelings, good writing gives images, good writing is interesting. In short, good writing is not boring.

In a "writing" class, Emir came to the conclusion Felicia made. Both discovered that to write well they needed to define good (and boring) writing for themselves rather than memorizing textbook abstractions about what makes interesting prose. Once they learned to freewrite about topics they cared about, they had no trouble writing formal essays on abstract (pedagogical) issues. I close as Emir closed, and in total agreement with him:

> "In order to learn writing, let's read and write FREELY."

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When Theory and Intuition Meet:

An Approach to Composition Instruction

by
Ali A. Aghbar and Kathy Trump

Preliminary Remarks

This paper, which is the result of long discussions and various professional collaborations between the two of us, intertwines our intuitive insights about writing with some of the theories of language learning and writing that have been advanced in recent years. We have maintained a dialogue format by taking turns in presenting our ideas. The letter A at the beginning of a paragraph signals that Ali Aghbar is talking, while the letter K indicates Kathy Trump's remarks.

The Two Selves

A: As we become adults, we become more self-conscious, which makes it difficult for us to perform certain activities. For example, when I appear in front of an audience to speak or prepare to write for a learned audience, I feel nervous. This is due to certain fears that I experience. I may fear that I might not live up to what the audience expects of me or what I myself would like to produce or that I might make a fool of myself. These and other worries interfere with my performance. I feel much like the divided self described in Gallwey's Inner Tennis.[2] On the one hand, there is the self that performs. On the other hand, there is the criticizing self that constantly reminds me that I am addressing an audience and brings fears to my mind. If I could somehow quiet the criticizing self, I would probably be a much better performer in almost all activities including speaking and writing.

K: The concrete nature of written language seems to heighten fears and can put the criticizing self into overdrive. When we speak, the words are there for a moment and then gone. But the

written word is there for all to see -- and to judge. Unfortunately, the majority of the writing done by ESL writers is done in judgemental situations with the teacher correcting and grading their work. Someone is usually looking over the students' shoulders as they write, which serves to raise their anxieties to an unproductive level. What needs to be done instead is to subdue the criticizing self so that students can tap into their full potential as writers. Building up the students' confidence in their abilities as writers will go a long way toward achieving this goal. But how do we build up that self-confidence in our students?

Developing Self-Confidence

A: I will explain how I developed self-confidence in writing English, which is a second language to me, but I will first say a few words about my general background in writing. My native tongue is Persian, but I first felt comfortable expressing my thoughts in writing in English. I did not learn to write well in Persian in high school because I did very little writing. I think there were two major reasons for my lack of interest in writing. First of all, I was expected to write flowery introductions and fancy conclusions. It was one thing to write about a topic and quite another to produce highly literary introductions and conclusions. The other thing that kept me from writing was the kind of topics I was asked to write about, topics such as "Love", "Honesty" and "Why knowledge is Better than Money." Here, I was expected to argue like a philosopher when writing about a topic. Had I been asked to write about topics that were familiar to me or were related to things that I had been experiencing, I would have done much better.

In college, I majored in English and during my years as an undergraduate student I did a lot of writing in English. Here, I was not expected to produce those fancy introductions and conclusions and I was given topics with which I was familiar. As a result, I felt at ease expressing myself in English. After some time, I developed a great deal of self-confidence in my ability to write in English. Interestingly enough, this self-confidence helped me feel that I could also write well in Persian, and, with practice, I became a good writer in my native tongue as well.

I see two important aspects to writing: the what of writing, that is, the information to be communicated; and the how of writing, that is, the way to communicate that information. As I was learning to write in English, whenever I had the what of writing, the how of writing did not pose much of a problem to me. My teachers might have taught me rhetorical rules but, when I wrote, I was so involved with getting my thoughts across that I rarely paid attention to those rules.

K: When students have something to say, when the "what of it" is already in their minds, they have an easier time getting words on paper. Writing is communication and students can only write effectively when they have something to say. When they know what it is they want to convey to the reader, the "how of it" is often right there for them. In other words, content will dictate form. The appropriate rhetorical form will seem to grow naturally out of the content. Descriptions, comparisons and persuasive paragraphs will appear in the students' writings because the content will force their appearance.

Learning Via The Right Side of the Brain

A: In more modern cultures, the emphasis has shifted from informal education to formal education: we now feel we must provide rules and special instructions for doing many of the things that, in the past, would have been learned mainly through observation and practice. I once heard Harry Reasoner on the radio talk facetiously about a friend who signed up for intensive courses on how to use household gadgets. He thought that perhaps his friend was a bit of an eccentric because he had once taken a crash course entitled, "You and Your Toaster," but he added that probably the true reason why his friend signed up for the course was the complicated instructions that come with gadgets. He said, "When we buy a new record player, if we play with it for a few minutes, by some magic of the right hemisphere of the brain, we figure out how the thing works, but if we start by reading the instructions we are forever lost." Reasoner concluded by saying, "We are better equipped to do some things than we are to understand how to do them."

I believe Harry Reasoner's conclusion applies to writing as well. I have found that it is much easier to learn to write through writing than it is through being told what I am supposed to do when I write.

K: Just as Harry Reasoner would not suggest that we throw away all instruction manuals, I am not suggesting that we never teach organization and rhetorical forms. What I am saying is that it is more effective to teach these aspects of writing (as well as many others) as they relate to a particular piece of writing the student is working on. Telling a student how to organize a good paragraph and then asking him to write such a paragraph is not as effective as taking a paragraph from the student's writing and showing the student why it is effective or how it can become more effective. Most students will understand and retain an explanation of good paragraph structure better if that explanation is given as teacher and student work together to improve a piece of the student's writing.

Jumping into the Water

A: I developed good writing skills not because I received good instruction on how to write but because I did a great deal of writing. When I was talking about this aspect of writing in Kathy's freshman EFL composition class, one student said that, in his opinion, the best way to learn to write was to read good writers. I agreed with him wholeheartedly, stating that this was particularly important for foreign students who have had little previous exposure to English. However, I added that there was more to learning to write than just having good models. In my opinion, learning to write, much like learning sports, has three requirements: models; instructions; and practice. Let us take swimming as an example. If we want to learn to swim, we need a model; we need to watch good swimmers to see what they do. We also need good instruction. However, if we stop there, we will never learn to swim. I myself have watched good swimmers and can tell beginners what they should do when they are swimming, but I do not know how to swim! To learn to swim, we must also jump into the water and practice. The same thing is true of writing. Good models and good instruction are very important but they alone do not teach one how to write. Good writing is achieved through practice along with exposure to good models and some instruction when necessary.

K: As teachers, we have to set up in our classrooms the right conditions for good writing practice. Let's go back to the swimming analogy. To learn to swim well, swimmers need to spend some practice time in the pool with no instructor present so that they can experiment with their strokes. The same is true of writers. They need to practice writing in non-judgemental situations where they too can experiment, take risks and try out new things. We need to give student writers time, as part of the classroom routine or as homework, to write in a purely practice mode.

How can we give our student writers non-judgemental situations in which to write? Letter writing might be an answer. When I look back on my experiences as a writer in high school and college, I find that writing letters to good friends was the one time that I enjoyed writing and could write without teacher-imposed constraints.

Practicing Writing in Non-Judgemental Situations

A: Letter writing helped me as well. It helped me acquire confidence in my ability to write and gave me a good opportunity to practice writing. I had many American friends and a British friend to whom I wrote letters frequently. This gave me a natural reason to write in English. When I wrote letters, I focused on communicating ideas. Very rarely did I think about what grammatical or rhetorical rules to use. And I knew my friends were not evaluating my writing skills but were rather

responding to the thought content of my letters. They would, from time to time, tell me that I was able to express my thoughts well. This positive feedback about my communicative ability encouraged me to continue writing.

K: Letter writing is one good practice situation for writers. When we write a letter to a good friend, we have the "what of it" and we can experiment a little with the "how of it." But since we can't ask our students to spend a whole semester writing letters to friends, we need to find other ways to give them good practice time. Many ESL teachers have been experiencing a great deal of success with dialog journals. On closer examination, we can see that a dialog journal is a series of friendly letters between students and teacher. The students communicate their ideas to the teacher through the writing in their dialog journals. The teacher then responds to the content of the journal but does not correct or grade the student's work. Content (the "what of writing") is the important aspect of a dialog journal.

Journal writing of any kind seems to give students time to try out their wings as writers, with the criticizing self relegated to a shelf for the time being. Journals can take many forms depending on the teacher, the level of the students, or the nature of the course. For example, students can be asked to respond in writing to an assigned reading, they can respond to a class discussion or the whole class can spend two or three minutes brainstorming ideas for journal entries. Another activity that can stimulate journal writing is to ask students to write about themselves as writers; for instance, they can write about what they liked about the paper they just handed in, what they will do differently next time or how, when and where they revised this paper. Of course, if they wish, they can write about anything that is on their minds. The exact nature of the journal writing doesn't seem to be important, as long as it remains practice writing. Since practice writing is important for what it says, not how it says it, this writing should not be graded or corrected. A journal, whatever form it may take and whatever the teacher chooses to call it, is a wonderful way to give student writers a chance to jump in the water and try their strokes.

Often, probably because of the nature of their previous educational experiences, foreign students don't feel that this free writing is helpful to them. They insist that the teacher correct everything they write.

<u>Learning to Write through Free-writing</u>

A: When I was sharing my thoughts on writing in Kathy's class this spring, one student asked me what I thought of free-writing. I reminded this student that, when he came to the English Language Institute two years before, he spoke English quite

fluently but that his writing was full of all kinds of errors in spelling, grammar, and vocabulary. Then I asked him how he had learned to speak in English. He said that he had travelled to England with his family when he had been around ten years old and that he had picked up English through speaking with English children his own age. I asked him if he had made a lot of mistakes at first. He said that he had but that the mistakes had not stopped him. I asked him what would have happened if someone had told him he was not supposed to speak unless he could produce good correct sentences and express his ideas in a well-organized manner. He said he didn't think he could have learned English that way. I told this student that learning to write is very much like learning to speak; we learn to write through writing. Of course, we make a lot of mistakes at first, but through practicing and experimenting with the language, we gradually reach higher stages of writing. Free-writing helps us do this in a non-threatening environment.

K: By helping ESL writers learn to write quickly and freely, with their attention focused on content, we can help them quiet the criticizing self, thus allowing them to tap into their true fluency in English. Free-writing takes the focus off form. This shift in focus will often result in a dramatic increase in students' ability to write. When students write freely, they often write with fewer errors and with more clarity and coherence. The garbled, incomprehensible sentences we are all familiar with will often disappear.

Well-intended Teachers Can Do Harm

A: I have found Kathy's statements to be true in my own experience teaching English as a foreign language. About eight years ago, when I was teaching English at a university in Iran, I had the opportunity to teach the same group of sophomore English students both composition and an introductory course in literature. For the composition class, I marked the students' papers and corrected all their grammatical and rhetorical errors. Then I diligently planned lessons to deal with the students' common errors. Much to my dismay, my efforts produced little improvement in the writing of the poorer students. Their writing continued to be awkward, hard to read, and full of the same errors I had corrected time and time again. However, when I gave essay questions to the same group of students in their literature class, they produced much more fluent and coherent writing. I was not able to understand why that was happening but I think I understand now. For one thing, in the composition class, I was making my students self-conscious by focusing too much on their errors. Instead of helping them to quiet the criticizing self, I was feeding it. Moreover, I think I was giving them topics that were rather esoteric. Finally, I was forcing them to use structures that they were not ready for at

that stage in their development. These conditions were not present when the students were writing essays in their literature class.

K: As Ali discovered while teaching his two classes in Iran, putting the emphasis on form too early in the writing process can have a negative effect.

It is interesting to look at the role of free-writing in the light of Krashen's Monitor Theory. Krashen (1978) concludes that speakers of English as a second language use their Monitor, that is, the body of rules of grammar (and we may add the rules of rhetoric) that have been learned consciously through formal instruction, to self-correct their performance. However, he adds that this is possible only when there is ample time and focus on form; when the emphasis is on communication, the Monitor is barely used. Krashen also distinguishes three kinds of Monitor users: the under-users; the over-users; and the optimal users. Adult students in EFL classes at universities and colleges tend to be overusers of the Monitor. As a result, their writing often sounds contrived and stilted. We have found that free-writing, which shifts the emphasis entirely onto communication, minimizes the use of the Monitor; consequently, the writing thus produced is fluent. Of course, students can use their conscious learning to self-correct when they are editing and revising their work. Thus, by combining free-writing and an opportunity to revise, we encourage our students to use the Monitor optimally; that is, they put the Monitor to rest when they are free-writing and activate it when they are revising and editing. The result is fluent writing with a high degree of accuracy.

Getting over the Hump

A: For me, the toughest stage in writing is the beginning, the stage when we are staring at a blank page and wondering how on earth we are going to begin. I recently shared this experience with an artist who said that, for him, too, the beginning is very tough. He said, "Staring at a blank canvas can be agonizing." We both agreed that our tasks become much easier once we have started and that we sometimes surprise ourselves by producing works that we did not think we were capable of producing.

Having realized that the beginning is an impediment in writing, I have developed a few techniques to overcome it. Sometimes, I tell myself I will write the beginning very fast and then will rewrite it later. This helps me get started and then the task of writing does not seem half as difficult as it did at first. When it is time to rewrite the beginning, I can do that very quickly by making a few changes although I often find that the beginning is fine just the way it is. Another technique I use is skipping the beginning. I start with the body and say to myself that I can always write the beginning

later. Again, this helps me get over that beginning hump. Writing the beginning after I have written the body is not difficult at all and I sometimes realize that the beginning is not really needed anyway.

Where the body is concerned, I try to write what I want to say as fast as I can without agonizing over words, phrases, and sentences. I know that I can always go over my writing and edit it. This not only makes the writing less taxing for me, but it also helps me produce a much more coherent and unified piece of writing than I would if I had to monitor every idea, word, and sentence that I wanted to express.

K: Often we don't know what we are going to say in the body of our writing until we have actually written it. Therefore, writing an introduction before we've written the paper can be very difficult. Writing is a process of discovery. Many published authors say that the text seems to take on a life of its own as they compose. (In fact, I never intended to write this paragraph -- it seemed to appear on my word processor screen as though someone else were writing it.) Because of the discovery nature of writing, asking students to produce a complete, well-formed introduction before they've written the body can be a very frustrating experience for them.

There are many techniques that can be used to help students get started with their writing. One of the best is to ask students to do free-writing or journal writing on a topic before the word "paper" is ever mentioned. If students are to write a paper on any topic, even one as abstract as "Honesty," they should be given several occasions to do practice writing on the topic before the assignment is made. Small group discussions about the topic can help them get started with their journal entries. When they have written several entries about honesty (were you ever dishonest? was someone dishonest to you? did honesty ever pay off for you? what does your religion say about honesty?), the formal assignment can then be made. Small groups are also helpful at this later stage. Students can share their journal entries and help each other decide what parts of their journal writing can be used in their upcoming papers. But the seed has been sown; many ideas are on paper and the students have done a lot of thinking about the topic. They are not facing a blank page.

Unfortunately, when a formal paper is assigned, students often take the straightforward, flowing writing that they have done in their journals and turn it into stilted, convoluted sentences full of important-sounding, but often misused, words. It is sometimes difficult to convince them that a simple style is the best.

Potential for Growth

A: I use a simple, straightforward style in my writing. I remember when I was in college, there was a student who had memorized all the entries in a voluminous English-Persian dictionary. However, when he spoke or wrote, no one knew what he was talking about. I, on the other hand, had a relatively small lexicon and, when I wrote, I used only the words and structures that I knew well or was almost sure how to use. As a result, my teachers often commented that my writing was crystal clear and that it flowed smoothly.

When I shared this experience in Kathy's class, one of her students said, "If we continue using a simple style, when are we ever going to develop good vocabulary and good structure?" I told that student something I have come to believe in recent years: as human beings, we all have a potential for growth, a desire for bettering ourselves. If that potential were not there, we would still be living in caves. But we have left the caves and created civilizations because of that inbuilt desire to aspire for higher things. It is this same desire that moves children to learn language, to walk, and to do thousands of other things; without it, they would stay the same -- crawling on the floor and babbling for the rest of their lives. Adults, too, are moved by the same urge for bettering themselves. However, adults are conscious of this urge and this consciousness, which is a tool in the hands of the criticizing self, sometimes becomes counterproductive as they try to push themselves too far too fast. I told that student that we should continue using a simple style in writing and not worry about improving our vocabulary and structure because that is something which we will do naturally, one step at a time, because of that inherent potential and desire for self-improvement. This is certainly what has happened to me: the simple style I use now is far more advanced than the simple style I used ten years ago.

K: Writing, like any other skill that is acquired over a period of time (the ability to play the piano, to play tennis or soccer, to speak a language), is developmental. We have to start at the bottom and work our way slowly to the top, one step at a time. It is easy to see that a sixth grader is not ready to write an argumentative essay. The necessary skills for writing that kind of an essay come after many years of learning to use the language and of learning about the world. Asking writers to do writing tasks for which they are not yet ready forces them to skip rungs on the developmental ladder and often causes them to fall back a few rungs instead of progressing upwards.

As teachers we recognize the developmental nature of what we do in the composition classroom, but it is easy to feel that we must follow the syllabus or keep up with the curriculum. But, as Ali pointed out, there is a desire in each of us to

progress as far as we can, and given the proper conditions under which to practice their writing skills, student writers will naturally climb the rungs of the ladder; they will learn to write argumentative essays -- when they are ready to do so.

Doing the Impossible

A: I mentioned earlier that writers and artists sometimes surprise themselves by producing works that they never thought they were capable of producing. This happened to me when I wrote my first poem in Persian. When I was in the last year of college in Iran, I was working part-time doing clerical work at a nursing school. One day when I was in the nursing school library, my eyes caught sight of a fetus in a bottle. For a moment, I had a very deep, moving experience. I envisioned myself in that bottle and that fetus sitting in my chair. I decided that I had to write a poem about that experience although I had never written poetry before. I went home and started to write. In about an hour, I had a poem. I was very pleased with it. I ran to school and showed it to some of my friends and they liked it. I showed it to my teacher and he was very pleased and asked me to give him a copy. I finally showed it to a beautiful girl in college and she fell in love with me!

In writing the poem, I had the what of writing; the how of writing it was not all that difficult. What is more, I really surprised myself. On the one hand, as I was writing the poem, other ideas came to me and I was able to relate my experience to my quest for a meaning to life. On the other hand, rhetorical features such as rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, and organization came naturally. I was able to do what my conscious mind would have had me consider impossible.

I have chosen to relate my first experience in writing poetry in my native tongue because of its dramatic nature. However, my observations are not limited to writing in Persian; I continue to surprise myself in a similar manner when I write in English.

K: The first time Ali shared that experience with my freshman composition class I found it hard to contain my excitement because what he was saying validated for my students so much of what I had been telling them during the semester about the nature of writing.

I had been trying to help my students see that writing is usually meant to be shared. As soon as he finished writing his poem, Ali showed it to his friends and his teacher. When we put words on paper, we usually feel the need to share those words with someone. Therefore, we should allow classroom time for students to share their writing. Writing groups in which students can share their writing can be set up at the beginning of the semester. It is important to allow class time for the

students to get to know one another and to feel comfortable with their group members. By sharing their writing, students get feedback from their peers. That feedback should be of a positive nature in the beginning and of a more critical nature when group members have come to trust one another and are ready for criticism. Sharing is a natural consequence of the act of writing and time should be set aside in composition classrooms for that sharing.

The second aspect of writing that Ali confirmed for my students was the role of the sub-conscious in writing. When we open our minds and let words flow, we seem to be tapping into our sub-conscious mind. And this part of the mind often composes sentences that we didn't know we were capable of writing. When we allow our sub-conscious mind to do the work, we do some of our best writing. Putting the conscious mind to rest (turning off the monitor) opens up a flow of language that is often the best language we are capable of producing.

The third aspect of writing that Ali reaffirmed for my class was the discovery nature of writing. Because we make discoveries about ourselves and the world around us as we write, writing is a powerful tool that can be used by anyone, writing in any language, to help the writer better understand himself and his world and the relationship of the two. When Ali wrote his poem, he made some discoveries about himself, and he clarified for himself the experience he had just gone through. He didn't realize the full meaning of that experience until he had written about it. By allowing our students to do some of their writing in non-judgemental situations, we can help them learn to use writing as a tool for understanding. A letter I recently received from a former ESL student showed me that at least one person in my class had come to see the valuable role writing could play in her personal life. She said that in spite of her heavy schedule of classes, she was still able to find time to write in her journal whenever she had a problem. If we allow writing to be the discovery process that it is, students will come to see the power of writing as a clarifier, integrator and explorer of thoughts.

What is good for the students is also good for the teacher. When I give my students time to write in class, I write with them. And I inevitably learn something new about myself, the class or life in general when I do.

Concluding Remarks

In this paper we have not touched on many aspects of writing; for example, we have not dealt at all with the very important topic of revision. And what we <u>have</u> said certainly will not solve all of the problems of our ESL writers since becoming a competent writer in a second language is a long, difficult process. We have shared some of our thoughts on the nature of

the writing process for ESL students. We have also tried to show how composition instructors can use this knowledge of the writing process to make their classrooms more conducive to good writing. By helping each student tune into his or her own process as a writer, we can help them use that process to their best advantage.

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Notes

1. Kathy Trump is indebted to Dr. Marie Nelson. It was in Dr. Nelson's class at George Mason University that she first learned about the writing process as it relates to ESL writers.

2. Ali Aghbar owes his knowledge of the book Inner Tennis to Earl W. Stevick, who first wrote about its implications in language learning.

SHAKESPEARE MADE SIMPLE

Susan Lewis English

George Washington University

All the world's a stage
And all the men and women merely players.
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts...

--William Shakespeare, "As You Like It" II, vii

Drama is taking a front row seat in ESL classrooms. In recent years there has been a proliferation of books, papers, and articles on how to incorporate drama into ESL classes. Use of drama now ranges from the most basic role play to actual performing troupes of ESL students.

As an ESL teacher with little more experience with drama than bit parts in high school plays, I was surprised to discover (1) how easy it can be to bring seemingly sophisticated drama into the classroom and (2) how through this medium intermediate and advanced students of English as a second language can use English for communication far beyond my or their own perception of their ability.

Why Shakespeare? Since Shakespeare is known around the world, most adult and young adult ESL students with academic backgrounds have read entire Shakespeare plays in translation. The themes are universal: love, hate, trust, fear, friendship, death, and so on. There are generally about a half-dozen central characters in a Shakespeare play, a manageable number for group work. The greatest asset of Shakespeare plays, however, lies in their action-filled plots. Take "Romeo and Juliet" as an example: boy meets girl, boy and girl marry, boy kills brother-in-law, boy flees, girl takes potion, boy returns...the rest is history.

How can ESL students speak 16th Century English for five long acts? I don't think they can. I couldn't either. That's where simplification comes in. The students are given four things: a list of the characters, a synopsis of the plot, a room with floor space, and a time frame in which to recreate the story by ad-libbing their own lines in contemporary English.

While most performances actually consume only 10-15 minutes of on-stage time, the amount of class time required to prepare a drama can vary greatly. The fastest student production I have witnessed was a tragi-comic rendition of "Romeo and Juliet," which was prepared and performed within one 50-minute class period. In contrast, another class took several weeks to discuss the theme, visit a theater, host a director as guest speaker, watch a videotape on Shakespeare's time, and select roles, rehearse, and perform a very serious "Hamlet." After that, they attended a professional production of the same play.

The use of a video camera is not essential but can facilitate production and provide motivation and reward to student actors. With videotape, students can work scene-by-scene, capturing and preserving the spontaneity of each segment as it goes on stage for the first time. Afterwards students can watch themselves in action and, if they choose, authorize the release of the videotape for viewing by other students and teachers.

The teacher should resist at least two temptations in producing a simplified Shakespeare play--the temptation to sit in the director's chair and the temptation to correct students' errors after the curtain has risen. The best place for the teacher during rehearsal is standing by in the wings. During and after the performance are times for positive feedback. The proper place for the teacher then is in the audience leading the applause.

My students have revealed to me some of the subtler reasons for using drama in the classroom. Acting, like role-playing, gives students a chance to use language in situations of simulated oral communication. This broadens the scope of the classroom far beyond its four confining walls. Even better, organizing a drama requires students to interact with each other. The process of producing a play can become an opportunity for not just simulated but real communication among students.

Some say that to speak a second language effectively, a learner must assume a new role. If it is easy to take on the many roles which, according to Shakespeare, we play in our lives, then it should be easy to play a new role in a second-language environment. Unfortunately, for many language learners it is not easy. This is where drama can help break the ice. A play set in a strange time and place has an unreal quality and so is not threatening to the ego in the same way as real life. If a student takes the risk to act a part in a play and suffers no loss of ego, she or he may be similarly inclined to take such a risk by using a second language in the real world.

Shyer students in my classrooms invariably choose a walk-on part or the role of video camera operator, when a camera is available. However, once they have become involved in the production of the play, have familiarized themselves with the characters, and have walked across the imaginary stage of the classroom, they seem to develop confidence. They may change their minds and begin to take a more vocal role in both the play and other communicative tasks.

"This has never happened to me before," confided a shy Taiwanese by-stander-turned-actress who had never spoken out in any class in her life. She was amazed to discover that she could use a second language to accomplish her purposes. For this student, as for others, conquest of fear may mark a significant step toward effective functioning in a new language-speaking role.

How to Produce a Simplfied Shakespeare Play

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Write "Shakespeare" on the board.
B. Ask the students the following questions:
   1. When and where did Shakespeare live?
   2. Can you name any Shakespeare plays?
   3. What do you know about these plays?
   4. Would you like to role play the story of one of his plays?
   5. Which play would you like to do?
C. Measure the students' reaction.
   1. If the students are clearly not interested, abandon or postpone the activity.
   2. If the students are interested, together select one play. Then assign for homework the following short reports:
      a. The Life and Work of William Shakespeare
      b. The Cast of the Play
      c. The Plot of the Play
      d. The meaning of the following terms: the cast, the plot, the stage, an act, a scene, to enter, to exit, comedy, tragedy, history

II. PREPARATION

A. Look up "Shakespeare" in the World Book Encyclopedia.
B. Xerox the page which describes the play.
C. With scissors, cut the synopsis into as many scenes as there are changes of setting (see Appendix).
D. Paste the pieces of the synopsis on a sheet of paper, listing to the right of each scene the principal characters which appear (see Appendix).
E. Duplicate this handout, one copy per student.
F. Arrange to use a room with open floor space and, if possible, a video camera.
G. In class, listen to the oral reports. Respond to students' questions about Shakespeare and his plays.

III. REHEARSAL

A. List the principal characters on the board.
B. Give each student a copy of the handout.
C. Read the synopsis aloud as the students read along silently at their seats. Clarify vocabulary and meaning.
D. Ask students to choose parts and write their names on the board beside the character they will play. (In some cases one student will have to play more than one part, while in others two or more students will have to share the one part, dividing the scenes among themselves.)
E. Set a time limit for planning and rehearsing the play.
F. Ask students to begin.
G. Step to the back of the room to observe silently, offering encouragement and suggestions as needed.

IV. PERFORMANCE

A. If you have a video camera, record each scene as it is performed. Then play back the entire play without interruption while the students watch.
B. If you have no video camera, wait until the entire play is planned and rehearsed, scene by scene. Then sit back and watch the entire performance.

V. FOLLOW-UP

A. Offer praise and encouragement to the student actors. Do not correct students' language or criticize their performance unless the students ask you specifically to do so.
B. Ask students to discuss the questions below.
   1. What were some difficulties in planning and rehearsing?
   2. How did you feel about performing the play?
C. Offer one or more of the follow-up activities below.
   1. If you videotaped the play, schedule a private conference with each student to view the videotape and answer the student's questions about his or her use of verbal and nonverbal communication.
   2. Perform the play for another class.
   3. Learn more about Shakespeare's life and plays.
   4. Attend a real play by Shakespeare or any other playwright.
   5. Study and perform a play by another famous playwright.
   6. Take a tour of a theater.
   7. Write and perform an original play.

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"ROMEO AND JULIET" by William Shakespeare

Romeo and Juliet, a tragedy based partly on *Romeus and Juliet*, a poem by the English author Arthur Brooke. Probably first performed in 1596. First published in 1597.

SCENE		CHARACTERS
i	The story deals with two teen-aged lovers in Verona, Italy, who are caught in a bitter feud between their families, the Montagues and the Capulets. Romeo, a Montague, and his friends crash a masked ball given by the Capulets. At the ball, Romeo meets Juliet, a Capulet, and they fall in love.	Romeo = Juliet = Dancers at ball =
ii	The next day, the couple are secretly married by Friar Laurence. Returning from the wedding, Romeo meets Juliet's cousin Tybalt, who tries to pick a fight with him. But Romeo refuses to fight his new relative. To defend the Montague honor, Romeo's friend Mercutio accepts Tybalt's challenge. As Romeo attempts to part the young men, Tybalt stabs Mercutio to death. In revenge, Romeo then fights and kills Tybalt. As a result of Tybalt's death, Romeo is exiled from Verona.	Romeo = Juliet = Friar Laurence = Tybalt = Mercutio =
iii	Juliet's father tries to force her to marry her cousin Paris, unaware that she is already married. To allow Juliet to escape from her father's demand, Friar Laurence gives Juliet a drug that puts her into a death-like sleep for 42 hours. The friar sends a messenger to the exiled Romeo to tell him of the drug, but the messenger is delayed.	Juliet's father = Juliet = Friar Laurence = Messenger =
iv	Romeo hears that Juliet is dead and hurries to the tomb where she has been placed. There, he takes poison and dies by Juliet's side. Juliet awakens to find her husband dead and stabs herself. The discovery of the dead lovers convinces the two families that they must end their feud.	Romeo = Juliet =

THE MAINSTREAM ENGLISH LANGUAGE TRAINING PROJECT

In late 1983 the Office of Refugee Resettlement awarded a grant to the Refugee Education and Employment Program of Arlington to be one of seven sites nationwide to participate in its Mainstream English Language Training Project. The primary goal of the project was to link overseas camp training to refugee programs in the U.S. in a way that would facilitate the refugees' English language learning and transition to employment and independence in the U.S.

This paper will (1) briefly review the MELT project and REEP's participation in it; (2) preview and interpret, from REEP's perspective, the three major outcomes of MELT (the BEST Tests, the Student Performance Levels, and the CORE Curriculum Guide); and (3) point out some of the influence and implications the project has had for REEP and might have for other refugee programs.

INTRODUCTION

In late 1983 the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) funded the Refugee Education and Employment Program (REEP) to be one of seven sites nationwide to participate in a national demonstration project called the Mainstream English Language Training (MELT) project.[1] The award of a grant to REEP was in part based on the fact that REEP had already developed and was already using its own competency-based ESL curriculum (Mansoor and Van Duzer 1982). As stated in the Federal Register, the overall goal of the MELT project was "to identify, examine, and document certain criteria as they relate to the linkage of overseas ESL training and domestic

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[1] The other MELT sites were San Francisco Community College District, San Diego Community College District, Spring Institute of International Studies of Denver, Northwest Educational Cooperative of Illinois, Project Persona of Providence, International Institute of Boston, BMC Research of New Hampshire, the American Council for Nationalities Service of New York, and the Center for Applied Linguistics of Washington, D.C., were involved in the project's coordination, data collection, and training.

ELT programs. These are criteria pertaining to assessment and testing, student performance levels, and ELT curriculum design" (Federal Register 1983). REEP interpreted this goal to mean linking refugee programs in the U.S. to overseas camp training in a way that will facilitate the refugees' learning of English and transition to employment and independence in the U.S., and to provide means for documenting this process.

The MELT Project was designed to address the special needs of a new ESL population, refugees, who first started entering the U.S. in large numbers in 1975. This new population is quite different from those student populations which most existing ESL programs in the U.S. have been designed for. First of all, a significant number of refugees in ELT programs are middle-aged or older and are semi- or non-literate in their own language. In addition, many come from traditional and rural backgrounds very different from urban North American culture. Many arrive in our program in a state of disorientation because of the abrupt changes they have been through and are still going through. Furthermore, in addition to having the above characteristics, none of which favors second language learning, the refugees are expected to learn English quickly and sufficiently well in order to become employed and independent taxpayers.

The MELT project was planned in three phases which involved identifying what products needed to be developed, developing them, and field testing them. Phase I brought together experienced ESL practioners from both the U.S. and the refugee camps overseas for the purpose of consultation and development of curriculum guidelines and performance level descriptions. Phase II developed three new field-test versions of the BEST Test. Phase III involved the selection and funding of programs as "national demonstration sites" to help complete, field test, refine, and validate these new products. Because MELT was intended to be national in scope and broad in relevance, the sites which were selected varied in size, background, resources, expertise, and approach.

REEP was one of the sites selected to be involved in Phase III, the field testing and refining of the three products and components of the project, shown in Figure 1. This phase involved the field testing of three versions of the "BEST Tests" (Basic English Skills Tests), designed to measure students' general language ability. Secondly, Phase II involved the testing and refinement of standardized "Student Performance Levels" (SPIs), which would be general descriptions, by level, of students' language ability. Thirdly, Phase III involved elaborating and specifying a set of curriculum guidelines, the "CORE Curriculum Guide", which would serve as a reference guide for the development of U.S. based curricula.

OVERVIEW

Before describing MELT's three components in more detail, and BEEP's participation in the field testing of them, I would first like to present a plan and overview of the project and explain how it components might be useful to refugee programs in the U.S.[2] In this overview, I will use our site, BEEP, as the example MELT site. BEEP developed the plan shown in Figure 1 in December of last year when BEEP first began the project. The assumptions behind this overview helped guide BEEP's input into the project throughout much of the year, as we worked on testing and refining each of MELT's three components simultaneously.

As shown in Figure 1, refugee ESL students entering the U.S. from the camps would first be given one of the three versions of the BEST Test. The students' scores on this test would serve as an indicator of their student performance level (SPL). BEEP would then use incoming BEST Test scores and SPLs as the two principal criteria for placing a student into a BEEP instructional level.

As we continue to follow Figure 1, we see that BEEP has two tracks of instruction, "A" and "B". Track A would serve those students with fewer than six years of previous formal education in any language (and those who tend to be slower learners and in need of a more basic curriculum and instruction). Track B would serve those who enter BEEP after having already had six or more years of education. On the basis of their previous education, students would be placed into Track A or Track B. Then, on the basis of their BEST scores and SPLs, students would be placed into one of the instructional levels within each track. Placement into BEEP's instructional levels would be made on the basis of the set of correspondences between MELT's SPLs and BEEP's instructional levels shown in Figure 2.

What would it mean to complete an instructional level? In accordance with the recommendations of the COBE Curriculum Guide (represented in the center of Figure 1), the BEEP Curriculum would be comprised of various job and life skills, or "competencies". A student's mastery of any competency at any instructional level would be specified and measured by performance objectives which the student would be expected to master by the end of the instructional level.

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[2] I should emphasize that this is merely one interpretation by BEEP of how the MELT Project might work for BEEP, and it does not necessarily reflect the views of the other MELT sites or CAL.

Certain of these performance objectives would be prioritized as "key" performance objectives. These would be considered the most essential lifeskills for the purpose of evaluation of the students' completion of the level and readiness to progress on to the next higher instructional level. At each successive level, the performance objectives and the knowledge and language required to master them would become more difficult and complex.

Finally, as Figure 1 illustrates, when the students finish their instruction at BEEP, they would be given a different (but equivalent) version of the BEST Test, this time to determine their SPL <u>after</u> instruction. This second performance level would serve as an indicator as to whether the students had made progress in the program, how much that progress had been (and over how many hours), and what the students' job readiness would be in terms of general language ability.

THE BEST TEST AND THE STUDENT PERFORMANCE LEVELS

Of the three components of MELT, the BEST Test, developed by the Center for Applied Linguistics, was the most finished product when Phase III began. A refinement of its 1982 BEST predecessor, the 1984 BEST is a competency-based ESL proficiency test which can be used for placement and diagnostic purposes. During Phase III, BEEP helped field test the BEST Test, pre-testing 125 students before instruction, and post-testing 103 after instruction. At the same time, BEEP, along with the other MELT sites, helped evaluate and comment on all aspects of the test, providing the Center for Applied Linguistics with valuable feedback for the purpose of test refinement.

The SPIs are descriptions of students' general language proficiency in English regardless of previous language training. In this respect SPLs are similar in purpose to FSI levels, though SPLs are designed for a different type of student population and for lower levels of second language proficiency. MELT's SPLs are comprised of ten levels, the lower six of which are descriptive of students at BEEP and probably most refugee programs. In addition to describing language ability in global terms, the SPLs also describe ability by component or skill area (e.g., listening comprehension, oral comprehension, reading and writing, pronunciation)

Before field-testing the SPLs, BEEP and the other sites were first trained by the Center for Applied Linguistics (using videotapes, of actual refugee ESL speakers) in identifying a given subject's SPL. While BEEP (and the other MELT sites) used the SPL descriptions, and assigned

them to refugees, REEP at the same time made suggestions for revisions of the SPIs with regard to their clarity, conciseness, and consistency.

At REEP, we found the BEST Tests and the SPIs viable products which, if used, would equip sites to communicate with one another in the same terms.

THE CORE CURRICULUM GUIDE

Of the three components of the MELT project, the CORE Curriculum Guide was the least complete at the beginning of Phase III, and throughout the past year it has been the component which has demanded the greatest proportion of our time at REEP.

At the beginning of of Phase III, the CORE Guide consisted of some general curriculum considerations, an extensive list of competencies and functions by topic, an inventory of grammatical structures, and some sample curriculum formats. Because the CORE Guide was still in a incomplete form, our curriculum revision work was necessarily a two-way process. While revising its own curriculum in accordance with the recommendations of the CORE Guide, each of the seven sites was simultaneously making suggestions for how the CORE Guide itself might be revised. One problem we experienced was that we had to define our own curriculum in terms of a CORE Guide which was itself not yet completely defined. This two-way process, involving seven sites both influencing and being influenced by the CORE Guide, is illustrated in Figure 3.

Of the seven sites beginning the project, REEP was one of those which had already developed and was already using a curriculum which was similar in many respects to that which had been recommended during the first phase of the MELT project. For example, REEP's 1982 curriculum was already competency based, it already included and indexed language functions and grammatical structures, it already had a separate literacy track, and it was already organized into topics which were identified areas of student need.

Because REEP had begun the project with this 1982 curriculum, we were able to focus more of our time on refining what already existed, rather than on inventing completely new items. In addition, we were able to incorporate into our existing framework new ideas and considerations, recommended to us by the CORE Guide and the other sites. In response to the recommendations of CORE, for example, we shifted our curriculum more toward developing refugee employment and independence. Also, in response to the recommendations of CORE, we have introduced a cross-cultural component, a materials and techniques component, and a reading and writing component.

Furthermore, though our discussions with the other MELT sites about the project, we were stimulated to research and consider more carefully the definitions and roles which competencies, performance objectives, language functions, and grammatical structures should have in our curriculum and in our classroom instruction. Finally, in response to OBE's request that we provide a means for measurement and documentation of student progress (Federal Report 1983), we developed more specific performance objectives and more refined achievement plans for measurement and documentation of our students' performance.

In general, our continual work on field testing and revising the COBE Guide enlightened and facilitated the revisions of our own curriculum. We may summarize BEEP's revision of MELT's competencies to illustrate this. One of our tasks as a MELT site was to evaluate all the competencies in the COBE Guide. To facilitate this MELT task we developed the procedure represented in a flow chart form in Figure 4. After completing our MELT task, we were able to turn around and use the same procedure for the refinement of our own curriculum. As shown in Figure 4, we first evaluated and rated a competency in terms of its content validity, i.e., its survival importance for our students. Then we judged the appropriateness of its placement into the topic and level to which it was assigned. Finally, we judged its form, including its clarity, conciseness, and consistency of expression.

CONCLUSION

Clearly, BEEP's most valuable reward from participating in this project was our own education. Throughout the past year, while we were constantly faced with deadlines and deliverables, we were given a considerable amount of freedom to express and develop our own ideas. Throughout our work, we aimed at our original MELT goals of promoting refugee achievement of self-confidence, employment, and independence in the U.S., and providing standardized and reliable means for documenting that achievement.

How well MELT will succeed nationwide will depend on how well refugee programs throughout the country recognize the importance of MELT's goals and the potential of MELT's three products. MELT's valid aim for all of us, whether we be in San Francisco or Kansas City or Arlington, is that we, as ESL professionals, all speak the same language so that we will all understand each other and work together better.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This is a revised version of a presentation I did with Peggy Seufert-Bosco, REEP's MELT Testing Coordinator, at the 1984 MATESOL Conference. I am especially grateful to Inaam Manscor, REEP's MELT Project Director, for her many helpful comments on this paper.

THE AUTHOR

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FIGURE 1

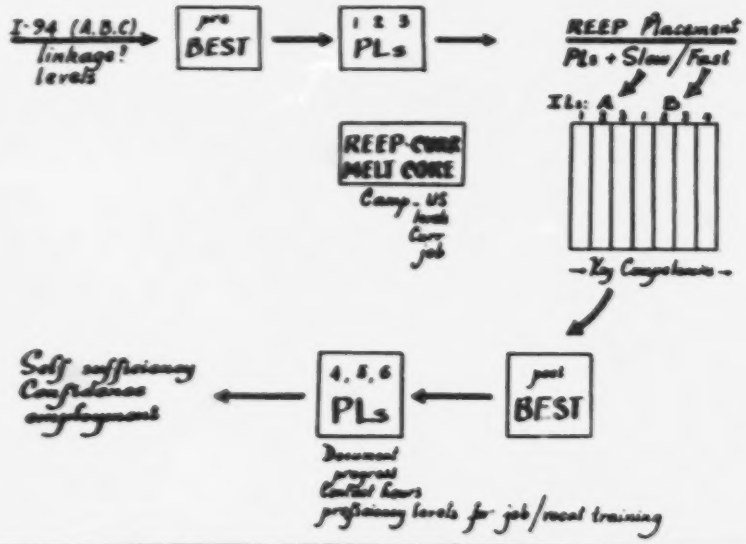

PHASE THREE : Test, Refine, Validate BEST, PLs, CORE
I-94 (A,B,C) linkage! levels
pre BEST
1 2 3 PLs
REEP Placement
PLs + Slow / Fast
ILs: A B
1 2 3 1 2 3 4
REEP-CORE MELT CORE
Comp. US Comp job
Key Competencies
Self sufficiency Confidence employment
4, 5, 6 PLs
post BEST
Document progress Conduct Exam proficiency levels for job/next training

FIGURE 2

Completion of REEP Instructional Levels	equals	MELT Student Performance Levels
		0, 1-
Literacy		1-, 1
A-1	mid B-1	2
A-2	B-1	3
A-3	B-2	4
	B-3	5
	B-4	6

FIGURE 3

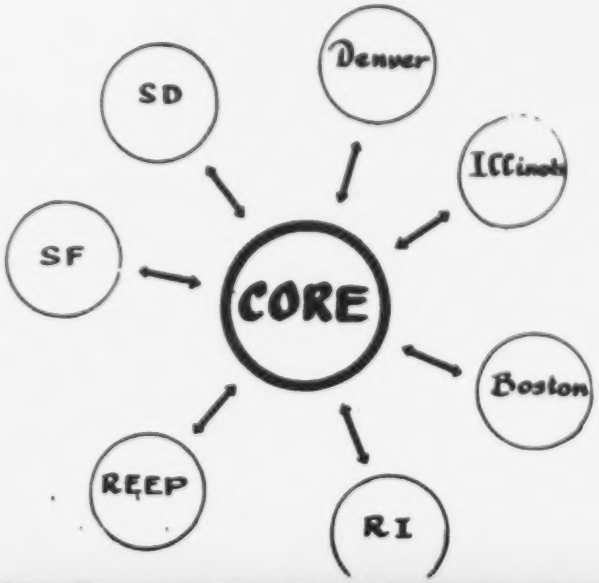
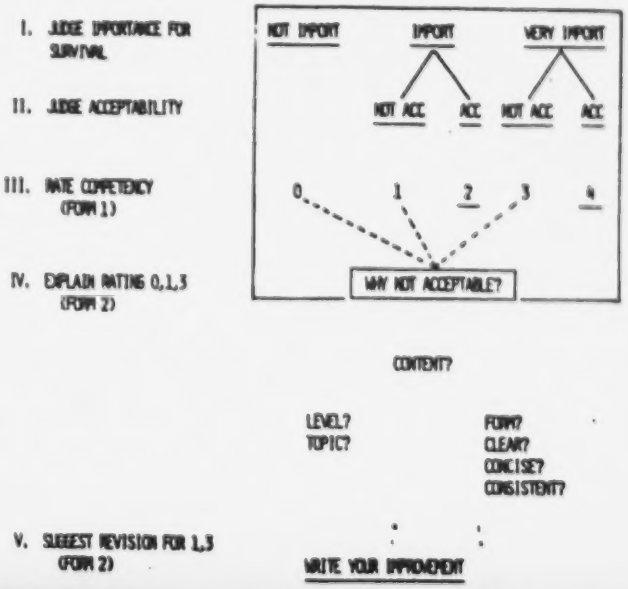


FIGURE 4

STEPS FOR EVALUATING AND IMPROVING COMPETENCIES



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Writing Phobia: Its Development and Arrest

Ask students in primary grades through graduate school to explain why they write, and two answers come very quickly: self-expression and communication. This is what they've been told by their teachers, so it must be right. Besides, they have to write papers in school, at least to answer essay questions on exams. Society forces them to learn, because they might have to write something "in real life" later--a memo on the job or a note to the auto mechanic. But when asked what they write, students literally "have no idea." How are they to "express and communicate" nothing? Writing is a trap of misplaced modifiers, faulty agreement, fragments and comma splices, confused vowels, non-standard usage--a maze of errors. Students are warned in advance about the seriousness of these errors and how much will be deducted from grades for each one. When teachers go error-hunting with red pens through jungles of student papers, it is inevitable that students commit the very sins they supposedly were learning to avoid (Shaughnessy, 1977).

Correcting mistakes in workbooks is the traditional task in English class, but teachers are frustrated to find that sequential vocabulary and grammar and syntax lessons have to be re-taught grade after grade. Homework drill and mastery of discrete "skills" as evidenced on objective tests do not seem to transfer into the students' own writing (Sherwin, 1969). It's an overwhelming dilemma for curriculum-makers: "How can they write essays or even paragraphs when they can't even put a sentence together?" When the lessons do "take," the writing products might be models of correctness and conformity, but their content lacks originality, coherence--often a thesis of any kind. If essays of famous authors are presented as examples, the effect is intimidating. Ability to "decompose" or critique a text (Berthoff, 1978) does not guarantee that it can be recomposed again, just as a wrecking crew is neither equipped nor expected to rebuild the structure. Furthermore, attempts at such stylistic imitation usually are no better than parodies, and a subtle message is relayed to students that everything worthwhile has already been written by Shakespeare and Milton.

A reaction against this building-block approach has been made by professional writers and composition teachers who do not believe that writing is a craft for which only the proper "tools" and "skills" must be supplied. The most extreme view has been expressed by Peter Elbow (Writing Without Teachers, 1973) whose freewriting technique depends upon the theory of writing as inborn talent developed by constant practice. As long as the pen is moving across the paper, if only to repeat, "I don't know what to write," the creative juices will eventually begin to flow. Merely dumping words on paper with regularity and frequency is enough. This is much like beginning a lecture with, "Any questions?" but classrooms turned into writing studios and teachers become facilitators and coaches are common. The novice writer is offered writing stimuli and an unstructured, often nonjudgmental writing atmosphere, and encouragement in the form of "Even professional writers struggle." (Murray, 1968) From this same philosophy of writing as art comes the suggestion

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that classes be suspended in favor of individual conferences, so that the teacher is seen as editorial advisor, responding to the artist's problems as they arise. Such sporadic guidance leads students to wonder why they are enrolled in a formal course and how they will be evaluated.

There is another "school of thought" about teaching composition. Flower and Hayes (1980, 1981) by studying writing protocols, the "thinking aloud" decisions made by writers in the process of composing, describe writing as problem-solving. Writers certainly must have appropriate vocabulary and knowledge of language structures, but they also need the intellectual ability to make a logical statement; social cognition, to create context for the absent reader; and knowledge of conventions of genre, texts of different types and purposes. All of these choices vie for attention simultaneously. But word-level choices made automatically by experienced writers preoccupy basic writers (and their teachers) to the extent that the functions of writing as concept builder and thinking tool are never fully realized (Emig, 1971). The writing process, rather than linear in stages of prewriting/writing/rewriting (upon which most formal instruction is based) seems to be more like a recursive spiral, and revision can occur at any point. Therefore, instead of reteaching "foundation skills" before any "real" writing assignments are given, teachers should be helping students, no matter how young, to discover their own ideas (invention). This can be done through discussion and reading, two ways to expand experience. "What is there to say" precedes "How to say it," because arranging and expressing those ideas (organization and style) depends upon the writer's purpose in communicating with an audience of actual readers. Students must be relieved of the worry of error-making so that they can experiment with words to discover ideas.

Teaching Composition through Word Play

Generative grammar, a variation of Chomsky's transformational grammar (1968), is a system for understanding linguistic structures (Christensen, 1978). To kernel sentences (simple bases containing only subject and object nouns and present-tense verbs) are added free modifiers in the form of adjectives and adverbs, appositives, prepositional phrases, embedded relative clauses, and other more complex constructions. These cumulative sentences have directionality, texture, and levels of generality: that is, modifiers can precede, interrupt, or follow the base; modification can be rich and dense or scarcely enough to identify the main components; one statement can contain both general propositions and specific examples. Christensen's analysis can be readily applied to text already written: to dissect stylistic elements of a Pope essay, for instance. But generative grammar is a study in itself, and as such has proven too technical for teachers to present or students to use while composing their own papers. Workbook adaptations would require so much preliminary explanation that the exercises, instead of providing practice and opportunity for exploration of language, would tend to be fragmented and confusing. This is probably the reason for Christensen's theory not having been translated into composition classroom or textook practice.

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However, the sentence expansion technique has built confidence in my own Developmental English students (college freshmen, remedial level) when they were experiencing writer's cramp, writer's block, or--worst of all--writing phobia. When my reluctant writers complain that they don't know what to write about, I ask them what they talk about, and what they think about, and to share what they observe around them. If there is still a blank, I tell them my story:

> While driving home from work yesterday, I saw a man.
> He was standing on the corner.

As they wait for more, I say, "End of story." They silently wonder why I was struck by that sight and why they should care. Finally, one gets the courage to remark, "That's not very interesting," or "So what?" which gives me the chance to explain the choices: using precise, connotative or figurative language, or feverishly adding descriptors to the common nouns and verb. So I can say:

> A hunchback staggered and reeled in the gutter. OR
> The smelly, ragged drunken man stood teetering precariously on the dark and deserted city street corner.

Once while we were plowing through a particularly dismal workbook lesson on identifying prepositional phrases, I wrote on the board:

> Useless to underline phrases starting with prepositions unless you know their job in the sentence: to describe nouns or verbs!

And then I wrote: THE CAT SAT DOWN.

I asked them to describe the cat (what it looked like and how it acted) and the sitting down (where, when, how, how long, why). The result was a base sentence very well modified with naturally occurring prepositional phrases used both as adjectives and adverbs. Students couldn't believe that they all knew how to use them properly! But the real shocker was that, in spite of its length and seeming complexity, the sentence was still a simple pattern, consisting of only one main clause, and we could extricate that skeleton subject (cat) from the maze of modifiers.

Both of these demonstrations were performed on the blackboard, so I elicited suggestions from as many students as were willing to participate. They could have done seatwork or made small group decisions, and passed their papers in for grading. But those sentences would have been difficult to evaluate, there being no one right answer.

The Role of the Microcomputer: Discovery and Experimentation

The hand calculator has replaced slide rules and multiplication tables in most math classes, and microcomputers, by performing tedious computations, have enabled students to explore higher level mathematical concepts. In the same way, word processing programs are just now beginning to assure students of

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perfect copy at the end of a composition session. But the microcomputer, with its memory and flexibility, has capabilities that have not been harnessed for the student writer. While it does handle drill and practice and tutorials with infinite patience and precision, the machine can be much more than an electronic blackboard. Creative applications involve interactions with students. Rather than passively receiving information from a filmstrip or book, students are allowed to experiment with the help of the computer. Traditional educational materials simply do not engage students to the extent that a tutorial can: in meaningful learning, in inductive reasoning and problem-solving, in discovery of divergent answers and new concepts (Bonner, 1984). The Apple or Commodore could take sentence expansion to each member of the class individually, while helping each to explore and compare and evaluate more options. The boredom and drudgery of pencil-and-paper revision could be replaced by animated words, clear and correct displays, possibly by complementary graphics or color, and best of all, by instant replay for feedback. The computer could do all this if properly programmed (Kingman, 1981; Stefan, 1983).

The Play on Words Program

After the title page, "Play on Words" as animated letters marching down the screen and changing to "Word Play," the screen would display "The cat sat down," and then spread the words apart to make room for student input. Instead of lengthy directions involving lots of reading, questions could be added one at a time:

> What color is the cat? What breed? Is it sitting on a fence or is it crouching under a chair? What time of day or night is it? Besides sitting, what else is it doing? Where is this all taking place? And what will the cat do next or what will happen to it?

Syntactical or grammatical prompts could be given, depending upon how much structure the teacher wishes to provide and the general purpose of the lesson:

> Add a "which" clause after "cat." Start with an adverb ending in "ly"or with a verbal ending in "ing." Separate the subject and verb with a long series of descriptors, or with a parallel set of participles. Add a coordinate conjunction and another main clause; then subordinate the new clause and try it both preceding and following the main clause.

The computer would have to display alternate versions at the same time, so that they could be compared for style and effectiveness. Parts of the final sentences could be shifted around for different emphasis. Then questions for evaluation:

> Is there any difference in meaning between the two versions? Which one emphasizes the subject? the action? the description? What effect does changing word order have for the reader?

Since all versions would be correct in the sense of being grammatically acceptable, the student would be free from the worry

of error-making, and free to pursue the possibilities of language without penalty for his/her courage.

Another technique that would suffer from the tedium of pencil-and-paper trial-and-error is sentence-combining, which has gained such popularity that whole textbooks and courses have been built around it (O'Hare, 1973; Strong, 1973). It is even included in Warriner's grammar handbooks, a series used all the way through high school and into college. But that would be another program, nearly opposite to this one, although the objectives would be the same. In both cases, the student is led to experiment with language and the final evaluation would be made not by a teacher but by the student, alone at the keyboard of a microcomputer.

The Author

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JOB SATISFACTION AMONG ESL TEACHERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A PRELIMINARY STUDY

Lois Kleinhenn Lanier
University of Maryland College Park

As a relatively new profession, English As A Second Language has been and is experiencing growing pains. In recent years there has been increasing discussion about various aspects of professional issues, e.g. professional standards and teacher unionization. Such discussion has resulted in the formation within Teachers of English To Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) of several new groups. One of these groups is the Professional Standards Committee, chaired by WATESOL member Carol Kreidler. Under its auspices Profiles of Selected ESL Programs and Their Staff Employment Conditions, Volumes I and II (Romett, Butler, and Lanier 1982 and Iacobelli and Connerton 1984) have been published in an attempt to clarify the current situation in ESL. In addition, a publication of "Core Standards" by the same committee is forthcoming; this publication is an attempt to suggest general standards and guidelines within the profession. In addition to the work of the Professional Standards Committee, the discussion has led to the organization of the Program Administration Interest Section (PAIS) of TESOL, chaired by another WATESOL member, Shirley Wright. Finally, a column on professional issues now appears regularly in the TESOL Newsletter.

The discussion about professional standards is, perhaps, an outgrowth of job dissatisfaction, that is dissatisfaction with contractual agreements or lack of such, low pay, few or no fringe benefits, and perceived lack of administrative acceptance of ESL faculty as professionals. It has been my observation that faculty in most ESL programs exhibit this dissatisfaction with displays of discontent, cynicism, and general professional unhappiness. Ultimately, in fact, many ESL professionals leave the field.

There are ESL professionals, nonetheless, who do enjoy their work and who do seem professionally satisfied. The question that arises is, "Why do some ESL professionals express feelings of productivity and satisfaction with their work while others are discontent?" For the purposes of this study, the question is more specific: What conditions exist in a university ESL institute which create feelings of job satisfaction? Recognizing some of the conditions, of course, might not only contribute to the continuing discussion about professional standards, but, more importantly, may offer insights into constructive means of improving employment conditions.

METHODS

In the fall of 1984 directors of five university ESL institutes in the Washington, D.C. area were contacted and agreed to distribute questionnaires to their faculty members. Questionnaires were given to faculty members with a cover letter which included a brief explanation of the study (See Appendices 1 and 2). A self-addressed, stamped envelope was enclosed with each questionnaire so that participants could return their responses anonymously. In addition to demographic information, these questionnaires asked for information relating to contractual agreements, work environment, academic environment, and administrative environment. The results are summarized below.

Due to time and cost constraints, this study is non-random and limited to the Washington metropolitan area. From this study, we can not generalize beyond the sample population used. Any discussion of results, therefore, will at best suggest possible trends for further investigation.

RESULTS

Of the 105 questionnaires sent to ESL faculty, 60 (64.76%) were returned. 19.1% of the respondees were males; 79.4% were females. One participant did not provide demographic information. The mean age of the participants was 39. However, ages tended to cluster between 30 and 45. This clustering is represented in Figure 1 below.

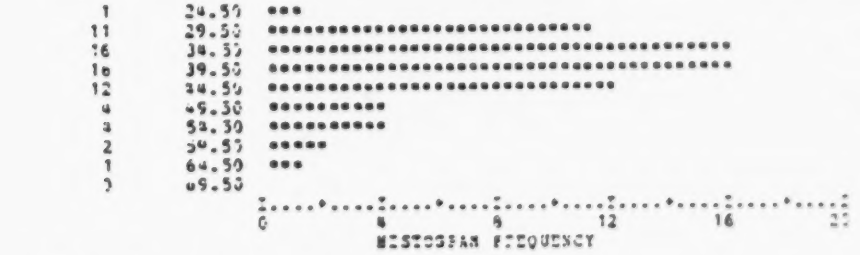

FIGURE 1. Ages of Participants

60.3% of those responding to the questionnaire had ten or fewer years ESL experience. Most taught between ten and fifteen hours per week. The majority (57.4%) of those participating were full-time instructors, either tenured or non-tenured. 55.9% of the responsees had at least a one-year letter of agreement or contract; the remainder had a term-basis contract. 61.8% of those responding had no fringe benefits. This would indicate that some teachers have a yearly contract without benefits.

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A majority (64.7%) of the people who responded to the questionnaire earned $20,000 or less per year. For nearly the same number of people (68.3%), ESL was their only source of income. Moreover, 60.2% of the respondees were principal wage earners, earning more than 50% of the family income.

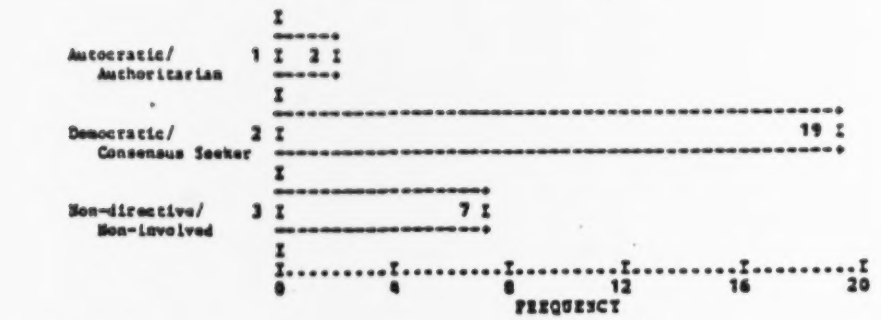
It has been said that collegiality is the main reason for remaining at a job. Interestingly, 35.3% of the participants in this study rated collegiality at their institute as low or only average. 40.3% rated the degree of idea-sharing among faculty members as low or only average.

A concern of ESL teachers is the number of contact hours which they have. This study indicates that while some people were teaching more than twenty hours per week, most taught fifteen or fewer hours per week. It should be noted that 35.4% of the people responding work in more than one ESL program.

Although most respondees felt they were becoming better teachers (89.7%), fewer (51.5%) felt they were advancing professionally. Those who were more satisfied with their jobs more often felt that they were advancing professionally than did those who were less professionally satisfied (62.1% as opposed to 48.6%). It is interesting to note in passing, however, that of those people who were less satisfied with their jobs, 38.9% were seeking another job.

Given a choice of three administrative styles, 50% of the respondees said that their directors were democratic, consensus seekers; 27.9% said their directors were non-involved; 13.2% felt their directors were autocratic, authoritarian. Six people did not respond to the question. Overall administrative effectiveness of the director was rated at the lower part of a five-point scale (from 1-3) by 61.2% of the respondees. It is worth noting, however, that 67.9% of those people who considered their jobs professionally satisfying (4-5 on the five-point scale) considered their director democratic (See Figures 2a and 2b). Also noteworthy is the fact that 54.8% of those people who considered their jobs professionally satisfying perceived their director's overall effectiveness as an administrator as very or extremely effective. On the other hand, only 25% of those who were less satisfied professionally perceived their director's overall administrative effectiveness as very or extremely effective. In general, those people responding to the survey felt that their directors appreciated their contributions to the English langauge program. Only 8.8% felt that their director didn't appreciate their contribution.

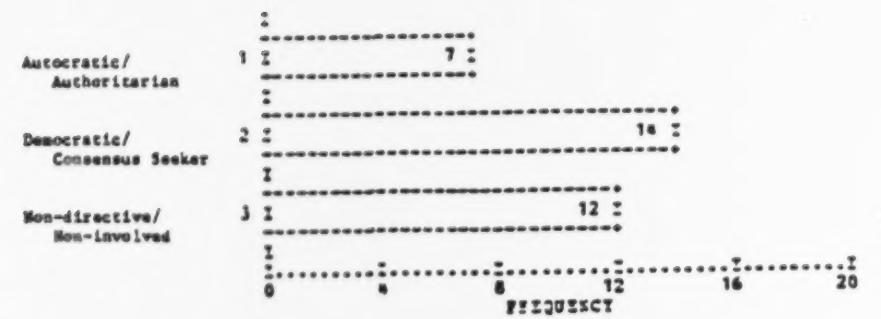
VALUE LABEL	VALUE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT	VALID PERCENT	CUM PERCENT
	1	2	6.5	7.1	7.1
	2	19	61.3	67.9	75.0
	3	7	22.6	25.0	100.0
	9	3	9.7	MISSING	
	TOTAL	31	100.0	100.0	



VALID CASES 28 MISSING CASES 3

FIGURE 2a. Director Style As Rated by Participants With High Job Satisfaction Scores

VALUE LABEL	VALUE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT	VALID PERCENT	CUM PERCENT
	1	7	19.4	21.2	21.2
	2	14	38.9	42.4	63.6
	3	12	33.3	36.4	100.0
	9	3	8.3	MISSING	
	TOTAL	36	100.0	100.0	



VALID CASES 33 MISSING CASES 3

FIGURE 2b. Director Style As Rated by Participants With Low Job Satisfaction Scores

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Teachers were also asked about their participation in goal-setting at the institute. 68.6% of those people who rated job satisfaction as low felt that their participation in goal-setting was low. Conversely, 58.2% of those people who found their work professionally satisfying felt that they participated highly in goal-setting (See Figures 3a and 3b).

VALUE LABEL	VALUE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT	VALID PERCENT	CUM PERCENT
	1	5	16.1	17.2	17.2
	2	1	3.2	3.4	20.7
	3	6	19.4	20.7	41.4
	4	5	16.1	17.2	58.6
	5	12	38.7	41.4	100.0
	9	2	6.5	MISSING	
	TOTAL	31	100.0	100.0	

VALID CASES 29 MISSING CASES 2

FIGURE 3a. Participation in Goal-Setting As Rated by Participants With High Job Satisfaction Scores

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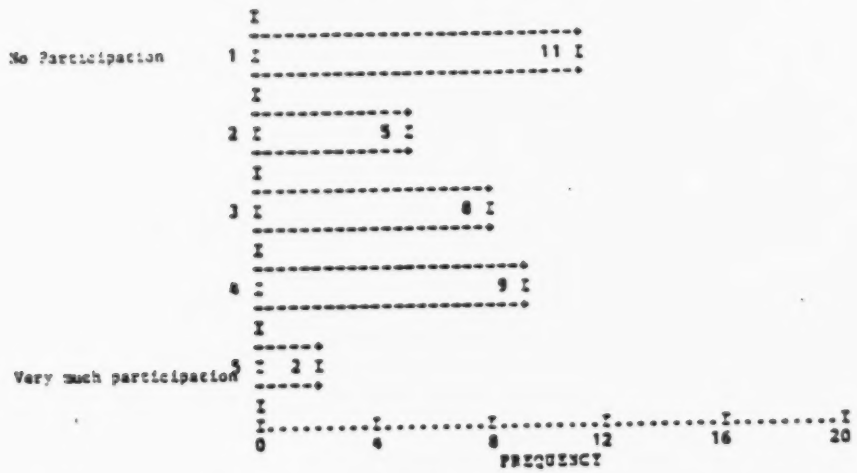
VALUE LABEL	VALUE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT	VALID PERCENT	CUM PERCENT
	1	11	30.6	31.4	31.4
	2	5	13.9	14.3	45.7
	3	8	22.2	22.9	68.6
	4	9	25.0	25.7	94.3
	5	2	5.6	5.7	100.0
	9	1	2.8	MISSING	
	TOTAL	36	100.0	100.0	



VALID CASES 35 MISSING CASES 1

FIGURE 3b. Participation in Goal-Setting As Rated by Participants With Low Job Satisfaction Scores

Superficially, it seems that certain conditions might affect job satisfaction, e.g. perception of overall director effectiveness, director style, professional advancement, participation in goal-setting, and so on. However, an examination of Pearson correlation statistics showed that no one variable on the questionnaire correlated highly with job satisfaction, the dependent variable. The strongest correlations were between satisfaction and director effectiveness ($r=.39$; $p=.001$), satisfaction and gross annual salary ($r=.35$; $p=.002$), and satisfaction and effectiveness of meetings ($r=.34$; $p=.003$). These are certainly not strong correlations and could be attributed simply to statistical chance.

To determine whether several variables together might correlate highly with job satisfaction, a multiple regression test was run, correlating satisfaction with a group of eight variables: idea-sharing, appreciation of the director, effectiveness of the director, director style, feelings that one was becoming a better teacher, feelings of professional advancement, participation in goal-setting,

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and collegiality. The result showed that Multiple R=.49. Such a result indicates that the variables cumulatively considered will produce a stronger correlation with job satisfaction.

DISCUSSION

How well has the original question been answered? What conditions exist in university ESL institutes which create feelings of job satisfaction? Based on the results of this project, there are indications--and these are very weak indications--that in the sample population certain conditions may influence job satisfaction. Style and perceived overall administrative effectiveness of the director, feelings of professional advancement, participation in goal-setting, for example, were of some interest. However, it was found that in this study, no one variable significantly influenced job satisfaction. Perhaps other questions, overlooked in this study, need to be asked. Or perhaps the same questions asked differently would produce different results. In addition, a larger, random sample of the population might produce different results.

Several points and questions come to mind as a result of this study and are worthy of note. First, the majority (60.3%) of the teachers responding to the questionnaire had ten or fewer years ESL experience. Why only ten years experience? Where are those people who began teaching twenty years ago? Are they now administrators or have they left the field? Why? A study of the attitudes of people who have left ESL, if the people can be found, might provide more concrete information about conditions which influence job satisfaction or, at least, job dissatisfaction. In addition, 33.8% of all respondees said they were looking for another job, while 38.9% of those people who are less satisfied with their jobs were looking for another job. Why is there so little difference between the two groups? What is the motivation for staying at or leaving an ESL job? Finally, this project focused on the attitudes of ESL instructors in higher education. Similar studies of other areas of ESL would probably yield different results. Studying conditions of teachers in Adult Education, for example, where full-time contracts and fringe benefits are rarely given, might allow for a very different analysis of conditions which affect job satisfaction. These questions, while related to this project, are not within its scope. Further investigation of these subjects might very well provide additional information which would be valuable for on-going discussion of professionalism in ESL.

* * * * *

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to thank all of the directors and teachers who participated in this project.

THE AUTHOR

Lois Kleinhenn Lanier is the Program Coordinator and an instructor in the Maryland English Institute at the University of Maryland College Park. She has taught in Adult Education and overseas in Japan and China.

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APPENDIX 1

Cover Letter

8115 Roanoke Avenue
Takoma Park, Maryland 20912

October 29, 1984

Dear ESL Teacher:

I am doing a study of employment conditions as a requirement for a graduate course in organizational evaluation. To complete this project, I am surveying teachers who work at several Washington area higher education ESL programs. The director of your program has kindly agreed to allow me to send a questionnaire to you. Would you please help me in this study by taking five or ten minutes to complete the attached questionnaire? Please use the self-addressed, stamped envelope to return the questionnaire to me by November 9. Do not write your name on the questionnaire.

Of course, all information is absolutely confidential. In any future discussion of this study, institutes will not be identified by name. Copies of my final report will be sent to directors of participating institutes. If you would like a copy of the report, please feel free to call me at home (587-3413) or at work (454-6545) or to write to me at the above address.

Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

Lois Kleinhenn Lanier

Lois Kleinhenn Lanier

APPENDIX 2

EMPLOYMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Sex:_____

Age:_____

Marital Status:_____

Educational Background (highest degree):

_____BA/BS

_____MA/MS

_____Ph.D.

1. How many years of ESL teaching experience do you have?
   - _____less than a year
   - _____1 to 5 years
   - _____6 to 10 years
   - _____more than ten years
2. How long have you been employed at your current position?
   - _____less than a year
   - _____1 to 5 years
   - _____6 to 10 years
3. What is your employment status?
   - _____part-time temporary
   - _____part-time regular
   - _____full-time, non-tenure track
   - _____full-time, tenure track
4. What type of employment agreement do you have?
   - _____a multi-year contract or letter of appointment
   - _____a contract or letter of appointment, one-year basis
   - _____a contract or letter of appointment, semester or term basis
   - _____none
5. What fringe benefits do you have? (Check as many as appropriate.)
   - _____paid annual leave/vacation
   - _____paid sick leave
   - _____medical insurance
   - _____unemployment insurance
   - _____retirement insurance
   - _____none
   - _____tuition remission
6. What is your gross annual salary from all sources?
   - _____less than $10,000
   - _____$21,000 - 25,000
   - _____$10,000 - 15,000
   - _____more than $25,000
   - _____$15,000 - 20,000
7. What percentage of your gross annual income is from ESL work?
   - _____100%
   - _____40%
   - _____80%
   - _____20%
   - _____60%
8. Please check your status as a wage earner.
   - _____sole support for self and/or family
   - _____principal wage earner for family (over 50%)
   - _____supplementary wage earner for family (under 50%)

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9. Is the office space provided adequate for your work?

_____yes _____no

10. How many people share an office with you?

_____one _____four

_____two _____more than four

_____three

11. Do you have your own desk?

_____ yes _____no

12. How often do faculty members in your program share ideas about teaching?

1 2 3 4 5
infrequently frequently

13. How would you rate the collegiality among faculty and/or staff in your program?

1 2 3 4 5
very low very high

14. What kinds of support and equipment are you given by the staff for instructional activities?

_____ typing _____video players

_____duplicating services _____video recording facilities

_____overhead projectors _____audio recording facilities

_____tape recorders _____films

_____language lab facilities _____other:_____

15. How helpful is the office staff in your program?

1 2 3 4 5
not at all helpful extremely helpful

16. How many hours do you teach per week? _____

17. Do you teach only at the program where you received this questionnaire?

_____yes _____no

If you answered no, how many hours do you teach in the program where you received this questionnaire?_____

18. How many students are usually in your classes?

_____1 to 5 students _____16 to 20 students

_____6 to 10 students _____more than 20 students

_____11 to 15 students

19. If you are not salaried, are you paid for preparation time?

_____yes _____no _____not applicable

20. How much teaching autonomy are you given in the classroom?

1 2 3 4 5
none complete

21. Do you feel that you are becoming a better teacher?

_____yes _____no

22. Do you feel that you are advancing professionally?

_____yes _____no

23. Do you think that students feel your English program is meeting their needs?

_____yes _____no _____somewhat

24. Do you think that your English program is meeting students' needs?

_____yes _____no _____somewhat

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25. How would you describe the administrative style of your director?

_____autocratic/authoritarian

_____democratic/consensus seeker

_____non-directive/non-involved

26. How would you rate your director's overall effectiveness as an administrator?

1 2 3 4 5
not at all effective — extremely effective

27. How effectively are faculty/staff meetings run?

1 2 3 4 5
not at all effectively — extremely effectively

28. Is participation in national professional organizations encouraged?

_____yes _____no _____somewhat

29. Are your conference expenses paid?

_____yes _____no _____somewhat

If 'yes' or 'somewhat', indicate the usual level of support.

_____full _____25%

_____75% _____less than 25%

_____50%

30. Are you given leave for professional development?

_____yes _____no

31. To what degree do you as a faculty member participate in goal-setting for your program?

1 2 3 4 5
not at all — very much

32. Do you feel that your director appreciates your contribution to the ESL program?

_____yes _____no _____somewhat

33. Do you feel that your program is an integral part of the university?

_____yes _____no _____somewhat

34. To what degree is your present job professionally satisfying?

1 2 3 4 5
not at all satisfying — extremely satisfying

35. Are you actively looking for another job?

_____yes _____no

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The Problem with "Formal" Research Papers

Dona De Sanctis

Of all the writing assignments foreign college students receive, none seems to intimidate them more than their first research paper. These are students who have only recently learned about the conventions of Western scholarship in their college texts. Now, somewhat uneasily, they realize they will soon be expected to use these conventions in preparing a formal research paper.

But the Chinese say even a mountain can be removed a spoonful at a time, and guided by this slightly sadistic bit of wisdom from the East, I decided to present the formal research paper as merely a series of simple tasks, during a recent EFL advanced writing course. One of our two weekly meetings became a "research paper workshop," where, for two hours every Thursday we discussed topics and did exercises to improve our understanding of research writing.

Assignments included choosing and narrowing the topic, outlining, notetaking, and the nuts and bolts of research: library techniques, documentation, and sober warnings about plagiarism and unsupported opinion.

All the students presented oral reports on their papers-in-progress, which the rest of the class judged, making suggestions for further improvement. The first draft, due four weeks before the end of the class, was read by me and returned to each student with detailed suggestions for additional

research or necessary rewriting.

The finished product surprised me. Most of my students handed in research papers that were inferior to the themes they had spent far less time writing during the semester. As I read these term papers, written with such painful attention to scholarship's rites and rituals, I realized my students had been paralyzed by the enormity of their task. And in their confusion, they had seized upon the more superficial aspects of scholarship (foot notes, quotations, and name-and-source dropping) to give their research authority and their thoughts legitimacy. My students, who had written amusing and insightful essays on American mores, who had filled pages of their dialogue journals with vivid descriptions of their daily lives, now assumed the impersonal mask of scholarship to write their first "formal" research paper. The results must have been as painful for them to write as they were for me to read.

During our first workshops, I had encouraged my students to choose term paper topics they were genuinely interested in learning about. Their choices included: the role of sports in American college curricula; US-Japanese trade friction; Thailand's king; China's one-child policy; Hong Kong's future and, of course, euthanasia. These topics leave much room for controversy, but my students' presentation

of "the facts" and the conclusions they drew from them were timid and conservative. Good research writing, like all good writing, startles its readers and awakens their curiosity. But my students were careful not to allow their research to be tainted by discord.

The problem became apparent almost immediately as I read their opening paragraphs. Most of these young men and women warily approached their topics. For a paper on the disturbing moral aspects of euthanasia, one student began with the prosaic:

> Euthanasia, the act of mercy killing, has aroused people's attention toward the matter of life and death. The most important question of prolonging life involves who should decide when a person should die. The decision-making process is a two-person bargaining situation in which neither the patient nor the doctor is in complete control.

Yet, buried near the end of her second page is a striking assessment of the physician's dilemma:

> The question of mercy killing is so difficult and complex that no matter who makes the final decision, a conflict usually follows. For doctors, euthanasia violates the Hippocratic Oath in which physicians promise to relieve suffering, but also to protect life. When a patient is in the most painful stage of a fatal disease, prolonging his life violates the promise to relieve pain. But relieving his pain by killing the patient, violates the doctor's promise to protect life.

In an interesting and thorough study of recent US-Japanese trade friction, caused by US imports of Japanese cars, another student began with a two-page analysis of Japanese and American industrial and agricultural needs, Japanese economic growth since World War II, some common causes of US inflation, the trade deficit in 1971, and the oil crisis of 1974. Persuaded at last of his real topic's legitimacy, he begins a well-researched discussion of his topic on page three with:

> In 1980, numerous Japanese passenger cars, an estimated 1.82 million of them, were exported to the United States. American consumers shifted from buying large American cars to the smaller Japanese imports. And the US automobile industry faced a serious decline in sales.

Clearly these students are able to organize their facts and present them with commanding presence. Why were they afraid to do this? But if getting off to a good start presented my students with difficult decisions, taking graceful leave of their readers proved to be even more of a struggle. They solved this problem by resorting to one of two strategies.

One group chose the quick clean break. Their conclusions were so abrupt that it seemed as if the pen had been ripped from their grasp by an angry censor. The paper on Hong Kong's political situation concludes:

> Hong Kong's future depends on Deong, the vice chief of the Chinese Communist Party. He is the most powerful man in the country and has encouraged an "open door" policy toward the West. But this policy may be changed when he dies.

Another paper, on the role of Thailand's king as a symbol of unity, introduces two new and interesting facts into the concluding paragraph, but these remain undeveloped since the writer has already put on her hat and coat and is racing for the door.

> Without the king, Thailand might have turned to communism because of the gap between the rich and the poor, but he does a great deal of work to fill it up.

Even the cautious author of the study on US-Japanese trade friction, who took nearly three pages to introduce his topic, finds the well of his eloquence dry by the end of his discussion:

> However, the US auto industry has recovered because of rising economic growth and falling inflation rates. But Japanese passenger car exports to the USA could be between 1.9 and 2.3 million in 1985, whether the voluntary restraints will be extended or not.

The strategy elected by my second group of students was more elaborate. Their solution to the elusive conclusion seemed to serve a double purpose: Bid the reader a leisurely farewell, and add to the length of their papers by repeating nearly word-for-word the main points they had made in the preceding pages.

"Begin at the beginning, go on until you come to the end, and then stop." was the white king's advice to Alice in Wonderland. I began to wonder if the help I gave my students during all those many research workshops had been even as useful as that. If I were able to teach those students again, I would organize the course in a completely different manner.

To begin, I would pay more attention to the kind of questions they asked me about the research assignment. These concerned amounts. "How many pages does it have to be?" "Does the bibliography count as a page?" "How many books do we have to read?" (They all avoided articles...) "What is a good average number of foot notes?" Twenty-twenty hindsight tells me my students understood "formal" research in terms of a formula or even a recipe. Stir in a cup of facts, a tablespoon of quotations, and a sprinkling of foot notes. Bake and frost with "therefores."

But even more serious an obstacle to their understanding of "formal" research was caused not by their naiveté, but by the way the writing course was designed. My students were expected to read two texts: one on rhetoric and the second on research writing; write and revise nine themes which were graded; research, write, and rewrite an eight-page term paper; and take mid-term and final examinations (each a lengthy essay written in class). The pressure on

these foreign students to perform such tasks in English for their first credit-bearing writing course was considerable, and, I think, even unfair. These students did not have enough time to think about their topics, to research them efficiently, and to reorganize their findings into well-written research papers.

The solution is either to eliminate the research paper or redesign the course so that students learn and practice thoroughly those research techniques that produce readable, useful research papers. In other words, all the writing would concern the research paper. Themes would not be eliminated. But the class would no longer write on the same topic. Each of the nine themes my students wrote for me illustrated a rhetorical technique. "My Room," "Life in the United States and in my own land," etc. was chosen to teach them comparison and contrast, description, causal analysis, etc. Under my new plan, each student would adapt the rhetorical exercise to the dimensions of his or her own research. So the young woman who wrote on Thailand's king as a symbol of unity could write a brief essay comparing the present king to Thailand's past rulers. The young man interested in US-Japanese trade friction could describe (and compare) the working conditions of American auto workers and their Japanese counterparts. The student who researched euthanasia could define clinical death or terminal illness. The point is that all the writing done for these individual essays on rhetorical devices would be related to the larger picture of the research topic. Ultimately and ideally, these "essays" would be inserted into the term paper itself -- paragraphs and pages of them.

Research topics would have to be chosen early in the semester -- within the first two weeks of class. Permission to change topics would not be granted after that period, but the focus would gradually change and narrow as the research progressed. For example, the topic "Women in Art" would be refined to "Women in 20th century art" to "Three Contemporary Lebanese Women in Art." And students would learn, as they research, perhaps the most important lesson of effective informative writing: Clarity of focus.

I would completely eliminate oral reports on the papers-in-progress. These sessions contributed little to the class's understanding of research writing and less to the individual student's grasp of his own work. Other than providing students with a limited opportunity to do some public speaking in English, these discussions served no purpose. (They usually degenerated into a private discussion between me and the student involved, with the rest of the class as a bored, but polite audience.)

Instead, each week I would ask a certain number of students (no more than three) to type and xerox their essays for class distribution. The class discussion would involve writing and rewriting these sentences and paragraphs. At the same time, the class would be learning about topic sentences, main ideas, foot notes, quotations, and all the trappings of both scholarship and clear writing.

Another assignment would be to have several students xerox copies of one of their sources -- only two or three paragraphs. These copies would be distributed to the class and we would examine the strong and weak points of the writing as well as of the research. The goal of this exercise is to show graphically to students "all that's printed is not gold." It will, ideally, make them more critical readers who are less likely to accept and be satisfied with everything they read. This, after all, is one of our goals as educators of the young.

These two exercises would allow the class to discuss and to see actual examples of good and bad writing -- by their classmates and by scholars in the various fields. All the elements of strong writing would come under discussion: Diction, style, punctuaion, vocabulary, imagery, etc.

In addition to these exercises I would also have students practice taking notes. Most of them simply copied pages and paragraphs from their sources -- a discovery I made when I reviewed their note cards. Few if any had original ideas on their note cards or any notes that resembled a dialogue between the reader and the writer of the source at hand. I would xerox a piece of research writing: a brief article, a newspaper story, or a magazine feature. They would all take notes and then we would discuss the results. This exercise should be done several times and might even be used as a test during the semester.

Finally, I would use dialogue journals much more than I did. I would devote fifteen minutes every day to spontaneous writing. Since I /would be spending much less time correcting themes, I would have more time to read the journals, make longer comments, and get to know my students better.

I would use much more praise and avoid dissecting their less-than-successful phrases. No more scathing comments in the margins about fuzzy thinking and dangling participles. Instead I will praise the good and merely underline the questionable. Students know when they fall short of their instructor's expectations.

I would eliminate all required texts and reading assignments. They will receive enough practice reading English as they do their research. And, anyway, no one learns to write well by reading about writing. I would limit bibliography to five sources and require that two of them be articles from respected publications. I would also expect that the students would have to read many more than five sources before they find the few that are really valuable. And I would be sure to let my students know that this, alas, is a sad fact of scholarship.

I believe if the term paper is approached in this manner that students will enjoy doing their research and will learn more not only about their chosen topics, but about the methods and procedures of reliable scholarly research as well. I wish someone had taught this course to me before I wrote those many dull term papers that punctuated my own college career.

BIODATA

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